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**THESIS**

**IS IRAN RIPE FOR A NEW REVOLUTION?**

by

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September 2003

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**IS IRAN RIPE FOR A NEW REVOLUTION?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

The study of revolution is a very popular and intriguing realm of social science. Iran has been undergoing a persistent state of upheaval since the fall of the Shah in 1979. Previous study on revolutions by scholars like Theodore Gurr, Theda Skocpol, and Jack Goldstone, suggest that within the context of a revolution, the final results are never readily apparent because people rebel against the status quo and destroy associated institutions whether or not they had a positive influence. The passage of time, leads to a pendulum shift from one extreme towards moderation. Iran went from a pro-western secular stance to an anti-western theocracy; therefore the question arises whether Iran is ripe for a new revolution that may bring about a healthier equilibrium? Using the framework set by Theodore Gurr in his book *Why Men Rebel*, this work attempts to analyze how *Relative Deprivation* has affected Iran. This method of measuring discontent will be used to see how the opposition stands up to the status quo in order to determine how the latter will end thus restoring the equilibrium, which has been proven throughout history and is elaborated upon by the above mentioned scholars of revolutionary movements and social upheaval.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter I is about the hypothesis that the theocracy in Iran will succumb to internal pressures brought about by Theodore Gurr's theory of *Relative Deprivation*. Also discussed is why Gurr's framework was chosen and how it will be applied.

Chapter II examines current conventional wisdom and will identify some of the institutions, personalities, and policies towards which, the dissatisfaction of the populace is focused.

Chapter III describes the theory of *Relative Deprivation* in Iran. *Relative Deprivation* is the discrepancy between reality and expectations within a given society. This discrepancy brings about discontent, the level of which determines what course of action the general populace will take against the institutions, personalities, and policies deemed responsible.

Chapter IV examines the *coercive balance* in Iran. The incumbents (*mullahs*) will defend the status quo while the threatened (dissidents) retaliate against measures employed by the former. Incumbents and dissidents should have three characteristics: ideology, institutions, and leadership. The relative strengths of these three characteristics determine the potential for counterforce. The combination of relative deprivation and the coercive balance results in the magnitude of violence, which is classified as conspiracy, turmoil, or internal war.

The conclusion will draw from the analysis of relative deprivation, coercive balance, and political violence potential to determine if Iran is indeed ripe for a revolution, and if so, in what form may the present government loose power. by collapse or overthrow.

## **I. INTRODUCTION: IS IRAN RIPE FOR A NEW REVOLUTION? THE HYPOTHESIS AND WHY IT WAS CHOSEN**

In recent times, the world has witnessed the manifestation of popular unrest focused against the ruling clerics in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the only longstanding theocracy in the world. As a result, keen Middle East observers wonder if the mullahs will eventually loose their grip on power. The major popular outcries in recent memory are the massive student riots in 1999, the hesitance of the ruling clerics to hand down a potential death sentence on Professor Hashemi Aghajari who asserted in late 2002 that Islam needed to undergo a reformation in the same manner as Christianity; and finally, the week of riots in June 2003 in Teheran, Shiraz, and Tabriz, which were some of the largest since the fall of the Shah. The latest set of riots was in part motivated by the presence of satellite television stations broadcasting from the United States. The June 2003 protesters also received moral support from President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair among many others. Given the current global political climate which is dominated by the ongoing “Global War on Terrorism” and the U.S. led overthrow of Saddam Hussein and subsequent occupation of Iraq; Iran’s presence on the “axis of evil” those interested in Middle Eastern events are beginning to wonder if the mullahs will be the next to fall, and if so, when and how would this happen. The objective of this work is to show how the interaction between certain conditions in Iran will lead to the end of the Iranian theocracy.

A critical analysis of events in Iran against the works of one of the foremost scholars on political violence and revolutions, Theodore Gurr, leads to a conclusion that the current situation in Iran is untenable for the *mullahs*. The first pressure point on the mullahs is the dismal economic outlook for most of the population, which also happens to have been born after the 1979 revolution. A second pressure point is the external pressure on Iran due to the “Global War on



Terrorism.” Iran, which is acknowledged to be the largest state sponsor of terrorism, has to contend with large U.S. military presence in Iraq, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The outcome of events in Iraq will have great bearing on the Iranian theocracy’s ability to control events at home. The third pressure point is the stifling of social freedom and the mitigation of political expression in a country with a relatively advanced civilization dating back more than two millennia with the Persian Empire. This is in sharp contrast to Iran’s Arab neighbors, which lived a mostly tribal existence that did not take off until the ascendance of Islam in 622A.D.

Theodore Gurr published *Why Men Rebel* in 1970. He seeks to explain the causes and possible outcomes of political violence. Gurr parts from the premise that institutions, persons, and policies of rulers have been the focal point of popular ire when they are not content with their collective lot. The political, social, and economic climate brought about by the institutions, personalities, and policies of rulers lead to relative deprivation which is the people’s perceived difference between two values: what the people have and what they are capable of attaining. If the discrepancy between the aforementioned values reaches a given magnitude, political violence is likely because the people will find solace in venting their anger since other means of recourse are apparently closed to them.

Gurr then goes on to match the capability of the dissidents to rock the foundations of the establishment against the latter’s ability to stay put; this is called the coercive balance. Note above that the dissident capability to shake the foundations of the establishment is mentioned. This is because when studying social uprisings, the fall of the established powers is never guaranteed unless it is being studied post facto.

The last element in Gurr’s analysis is the end state. Will the regime collapse, be overthrown, or remain in power. The end state is directly linked to the coercive balance. After prolonged analysis following Gurr’s framework, it will be shown through the course of this work that the third outcome is unlikely to hold true in Iran’s case.

Theodore Gurr's framework for the study of political upheaval was selected in this case because it is the one, which best-fit Iran. In the arena of social revolutions and political unrest, there are several notable scholars such as Theda Skocpol (States and Social Revolutions) and Jack Goldstone (Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies) to name but a few. Skocpol concentrates on the most important revolutions in modern history: French, Russian, and Chinese. Goldstone does a study on some of the same as Skocpol with the addition of the fall of communism, the Philippines (1986), Palestinian *Intifada*, Iran, and the guerilla wars in Latin America. These works however focus on the historical aspect rather than ongoing cause and effect issues. Theda Skocpol has a very authoritative account of social revolutions in her book, with the premise that the Chinese, Russian, and French revolutions were the most important in influencing today's world. That is true, however, if there is a revolution that has greatly shaped the way the contemporary world functions, it was the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the net result, the Iranian *mullah* led theocracy. The world is dealing with the aftereffects of the 1979 revolution. It is difficult to conceive of how the Soviet Union could have invaded Afghanistan in late 1979 had the staunch American ally, the Shah, still been in power. It is almost certain that Saddam Hussein would not have invaded Iran hoping to capitalize on the upheaval caused by the revolution in 1980. This being the case, the latter would not have had the need to invade Kuwait in an attempt to settle war debts against Iran. Hence Usama bin Laden would be neutralized on two fronts and would not be an issue. This is a big case of "what if" and therefore not the purpose of this work. It serves to show how destabilizing the rule of the *mullahs* has been to Iran and the Persian Gulf region. This instability has not served to better the fortunes of Iranians who hoped that the end of the Shah's monarch would be the beginning of better days. In fact this is the theme of Dariush Zahedi's book *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now*. Gurr's framework, which is centered on relative deprivation, is capable of helping Middle East observers in understanding how the destabilizing influence of the

*mullahs* has cheated Iranians of a life in accordance with their capabilities thereby bringing about political violence.

## II. AT WHAT INSTITUTIONS, PERSONALITIES, AND POLICIES ARE THE DISCONTENTS OF IRANIANS FOCUSED?

Keen observers of the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot help but notice increasing signs of civil unrest in the country, particularly amongst the youth. The events of the past few months surrounding the arrest, trial, and death sentence of university professor, Hashemi Aghajari, who called for reforms in the theocratic government have helped fuel the concern about the increasing popular dissatisfaction. Adding to the mix, intense student rioting occurred in Iran in June 2003. These were the largest riots since the departure of the Shah in 1979. The June 2003 riots attracted the attention of foreigners to the need for democracy in Iran. The country has been in a state of upheaval since a Revolution forced the Shah from office in 1979. The country has since been in search of a direction that would lead it to a prosperous future with social justice and popular sovereignty has seen itself fall well short of that goal. As a result, Iranian society has been focusing its discontent towards the institutions, personalities and policies which have set the country on its present course, namely the *valy-e faqih* (Supreme Leader), Council of Guardians, *bonyads* (Islamic charitable foundations), and the *basiji* (an organized band of government sponsored thugs). The personalities are the current *valy-e faqih*, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei and President Mohammed Khatami. The policies in this case are the suffocating control of social freedom, and continued animosity towards the United States. This chapter will examine these institutions, personalities, and policies, and determine why they have become the focal point of so much frustration.

The current situation in Iran is very confusing even for those who understand the country. The population's frustrations are focused on the ruling Islamic clerics. The perception among many is that the *mullahs* are ruling Iran because it is a very religious state. This observation is inaccurate. Religion is a very important part of Iranian society; however, it is not the dominant aspect of

the latter but rather the facet of contemporary life, which happens to be the power behind the government. The *Shi'a* clergy has a very tight grip on the reins of power in Iran. To understand why there is so much popular unrest against the Islamic government, it is necessary to understand how it came to power in the first place because through the course of Iran's 2,500-year history, the period from 1979 onward has been the first time the *Shi'a* clergy ever ruled the nation.

The man most associated with the *Shi'a* clergy is the Late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a learned cleric who became the face of the Iranian Revolution. However, his rise to power along with that of the institution he represented is an accident of history.

The Islamic government's predecessor was that of the Late Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi. He was a secular Western-oriented monarch who after 1953 ruled his country as a one-man dictatorship. He strove to drive Iran from backwardness to a world power. In similar fashion to his father, Reza, the Shah believed that for Iran to advance towards the ranks of industrialized and prosperous nations, the people would have to give up their traditional ways of life for they stood in the way of sustained progress. As a result, he curtailed political freedom and ruled as an absolute monarch. The Shah saw the ever-increasing oil revenues as the means with which he would provide for industrialization, and education of the country. Two key factors began to take their toll on the Shah, the first being his reinstatement by the United States and Britain after he was fled the country in 1953, and the increasing demand for oil which provided the Shah with the financial wherewithal to pursue his goal of economic advancement. The increased revenues made Iran in many respects a surrogate of the United States, which as the leader of the industrialized world, was a major customer of Iran's oil and an enabler of the Shah's internal policies. With increased education, Iranians began to seek political freedom and questioned the legitimacy of their country's government. Regime legitimacy is an issue that haunts most Iranian rulers; this happens to be the case for today's clerics and will be covered in the next chapter. The desire for political freedom reached a boiling

point in 1978 when massive protests against the Shah's rule began partly as a result of a fundamental change in U.S. government policy which under the newly elected president Carter promoted human rights and democratization. As a result of such pressure from his principal international ally, the Shah had to give in to the demands of his people, however, he was granting concessions from a position of weakness. Therefore, in the period of 1978-79, the growing consensus was that the Shah had to go and Iran needed political and social freedom, as well as a greater degree of economic independence from the West, America in particular. This is a parallel to today's situation in which the consensus is that the clerics must go but who exactly will replace them is another question. The failure to confront this question in 1979 landed Iran where it is today.<sup>1</sup>

Even though there was a consensus on the desired end result, there was no unity amongst the dissidents who ranged from liberals and socialists, to conservatives and radical religious factions. Therefore, when the Shah could no longer control the country, partly due to his personal indecisiveness, the country was thrown into chaos. By late 1979, the *Shi'a* clergy led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini solidified its grip on power and has retained it ever since.<sup>2</sup>

The clerics grip on power was solid but in a classic validation of Stephen Walt's study of revolutions and warfare, the Iraqi invasion in September 1980 helped Khomeini because the Iranian people rallied around him in order to defend against enemy aggression. With widespread popular support, Khomeini was able to justify the use of heavy-handed measures against his rivals further facilitating his consolidation of power backed by popular fervor.<sup>3</sup>

The *Shi'a* clergy or *mullahs* were unique amongst the ranks of dissidents because they were the only group that had the three main ingredients for the

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Goldstone, Ted Gurr, and Farrokh Moshiri: *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*. p. 126-7. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri, 118.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Walt. "Revolution and War", *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (April 1992), reprinted in J. Goldstone, ed., *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*. p. 328. Little Brown, 1993.

success of any movement advocating social and political change; they had an ideology: Islam, leadership: the charismatic Khomeini, and an infrastructure: the *Shi'a* religious establishment with mosques, money, and religious schools. The other factions that sought the Shah's removal such as the Communist inspired *Tudeh* party were driven underground by the repressive secret police apparatus. The leaders of the *émigré literati* (secular elite) had been in exile and were losing touch with the country. The *mullahs* were able to mobilize support through their mosques because they vehemently opposed the Shah because of his secular incursions on their religious domain, and the *émigré literati* allied with them in order to see the end of the Pahlevi dynasty. It was expected that once the Revolution was over, the *mullahs* would return to their mosques leaving governance up to the secular elites. The *mullahs* led by Khomeini did not follow this line of wishful thinking and instead consolidated power.<sup>4</sup>

In summing up the historical background to the ascendance of the *mullahs*, it is also important to mention the significance of the clerical infrastructure because as described earlier, it is in the case of Iran, the leg of the triad that sustains the leadership and ideology. In Iran, as with any Muslim state, the clerical institutions wield a great deal of power through traditional means radiating from the mosques and religious schools. One of the five pillars of Islam is *zakat* (charity). Every Muslim is supposed to set aside a portion of their income for a charity of their choice. A lot of the money goes to charity institutions known as *bonyads*, which operate with the sanction of the mosques. The *bonyads* will be examined in greater detail later, but for now, it is mentioned as a means of providing some baseline understanding of how power is institutionalized. The *bonyads* finance everything from schools, hospitals, mosques, and many other social projects. Therefore, the *mullahs* can deliver their message through their religious schools, which are financed by the *bonyads* that in turn are supported by the common people, among who the *bazaaris* (merchants) are prominently featured. Thanks to the fourth pillar of Islam, *zakat*, the tentacles of the *mullahs*

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<sup>4</sup> Dariush Zahedi: *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now, indicators of regime instability*. p. 42-3. Boulder, Westview Press, 2001.

run deep into Iranian society. This is coupled with the fact that the identity of Iran derives from *Shi'a* Islam, the second most significant sect within the religion. Although only ten percent of the world's Muslims are *Shi'a*, they constitute ninety percent of Iran's population. *Shi'a* or not, Iran is basically a Muslim country, and as such, adherence to the five pillars is part of the Persian way of life making a lack of contribution to the *bonyad* an un-Islamic act.

Another factor that makes Iran an interesting country is that it is the only one in the Middle East with defined borders. Unlike the borders of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, or Jordan, which were determined by former colonial masters, those of Iran almost resemble the borders of a European state because they are defined by geographical features and within them, a multi-ethnic state consisting of Persians, Arabs, and Turks, inhabitants who have lived together in relative peace. The multi ethnicity of Iran has been a source of strength as well as weakness. It is a strong point because the occurrence of ethnic violence is reduced. The weakness, as evidenced in the 1979 revolution is that it inhibits consensus therefore the *mullahs* with some difficulty were the only ones who were able to transcend those divisions successfully.

## **A. INSTITUTIONS**

Given the aforesaid background on the 1979 revolution and Iran in general, it is time to take a look at the Islamic government of Iran. A Supreme Leader, the *valy-e faqih*, heads the government. The *valy-e faqih* is a concept and an institution created by the late Ayatollah Khomeini. It is best described in the following extract from Dariush Zahedi:

This concept which constitutes the cornerstone of the regime's Constitution, justifies the role of jurisconsult (*faqih*) as the "supreme overseer, judge, and guardian" of the Islamic community. In his formulation of this concept, Khomeini specifically states that the religious jurist has a sacred obligation to become the final arbiter of the state.<sup>5</sup>

The *valy-e faqih*, once chosen by the leading *mullahs* who constitute the Council of Experts, the eighty-six most senior Ayatollahs, serves for the rest of

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<sup>5</sup> Zahedi, 68-9.



his life. Khomeini, as the perceived leader of the revolution was the first *valy-e faqih*. Upon Khomeini's death in June 1989, Ali Khamanei succeeded him. The *valy-e faqih* is the most powerful person in Iran. When the identification of institutions and personalities was made earlier in this work, the *valy-e faqih* and Ali Khamanei were mentioned. However, the Supreme Leadership should be seen as an institution. The *valy-e faqih* institution draws as much ire as the person who occupies the post, Ali Khamanei. The *valy-e faqih* position was created by Khomeini to be commensurate with his charismatic personality; hence his successor has a great act to follow. This will become clear later in the chapter.

The *valy-e faqih* is the representative of the "Twelfth Imam" on earth. The Supreme Leader therefore rules in his name and sovereignty is derived from God because:

The Almighty in his infinite wisdom had anointed the Prophet Muhammad as his messenger and through him, set down the rules in the *Qu'ran* in order to guide the community. The Prophet in turn, had founded an ideal state dedicated to the propagation of Islamic precepts.<sup>6</sup>

The previous extract gives an interesting perspective as to where the *valy-e faqih* derives his legitimacy. The *Shi'a* believe that Ali, son of Muhammad should have ascended to the leadership of the *Caliph*, but was turned down in favor of Abu-Bakr who was elected from amongst the followers of the *ummah* (Muslim community). Ali led a breakaway faction of the *ummah* and was killed in 661. Eleven imams succeeded him. The twelfth, Muhammad al-Muntazar "disappeared" in 878 and is believed will return to earth to deliver peace and justice. Therefore, because the sovereignty is derived from the Almighty, the people are, according to Khomeini, not in a position to choose their ultimate authority.<sup>7</sup>

The next institution in the line of fire is the Council of Guardians. They are a body of twelve religious jurists, six of whom are appointed by the *valy-e faqih*

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<sup>6</sup> Zahedi. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr. *A Concise History of the Middle East*. Boulder. p.79. Westview Press, 1996.

and the remainder elected by the *majlis* (parliament). The Council of Guardians should not be confused with the Council of Experts. The Guardians serve as the second highest appellate authority in Iran, the highest being the *valy-e faqih*. Their function is more appropriately described below:

The Council of Guardians is vested with the authority to interpret the constitution and determines if the laws passed by Parliament are in line with *shari'a*. This means that the council has effective veto power over Parliament. If it deems that a law passed by Parliament is incompatible with the constitution or *shari'a*, it is referred back to Parliament for revision.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most important duties of the Council of Guardians is the vetting of candidates for public office. There are two important criteria for selection as a political candidate, the first being “practical adherence to Islam”, and the second, “acceptance of the concept of *valy-e faqih* and commitment to the political system.” As their name suggests, the council has been the staunchest protector of the revolution. In the 1997 Presidential election, only four candidates were allowed to run for election out of the 230 that applied. The reasoning for this according to the council secretary, Ayatollah Janati was that “enemies of the revolution had to be weeded out.” The vetting process occurs for all elections from the presidency to local government.<sup>9</sup>

The third institution is one that has been mentioned earlier, the *bonyad*, or charitable religious foundations. The *bonyads* have been the interface between the Iranian people who being predominantly Muslim practice the fourth pillar, *zakat*. Some *bonyads* were set up by the Shah to engage in charity work and at the same time spread good words about the accomplishments of his regime. The Shah's *bonyads* were taken over by the revolutionaries shortly after his ouster. They were attractive targets because they controlled vast sums of money and land. Thanks to their inheritance of some of the Shah's fortunes as well as engagement in shrewd business practices, *bonyads* such as the *Foundation for the Oppressed*, *Martyrs Foundation*, and *War Wounded* own collectively over

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<sup>8</sup> Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) *Frontline: Terror and Teheran*, The structure of power in Iran. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/inside/govt.html> (7 December 2002)

<sup>9</sup> Zahedi, 105.

100 billion dollars in assets. They control over 40 percent of the non-oil sector of the Iranian economy. Because of this share, they exert a lot of influence in the government but are not accountable to the same. The *bonyads* receive government subsidies but the latter is limited in the amount of scrutiny it lays. The government's frustration in dealing with the venerable *bonyads* is even codified in the law; the *majlis* can initiate an investigation into a *bonyad* but it cannot take action against any wrongdoings. There is a very low rate of private capital accumulation in Iran and the foundations are one of the few means the government has at its disposal for internal economic investment.<sup>10</sup>

The *bonyads* have become a major economic impediment in the country. Iran is a nation that has experienced significant contraction in its economy. In 1977, the gross national product (GNP) was about 85 billion dollars.<sup>11</sup> By 1986, the GNP had shrunk to about 82 billion dollars.<sup>12</sup> In 2001, the Iranian GDP was valued at 115 Billion dollars.<sup>13</sup> If the 1986 figures were transposed to 2001, the GDP would have to be valued at 135 billion dollars; in other words, the Iranian economy has not kept up with the dollar and has lost one seventh of its value. The *bonyads* with their enormous hold on the non-petroleum sector of the economy have been able to stifle entrepreneurs. As a result, the *bazaaris* who are not in direct contact with the *bonyads* suffer because the latter have been able to dominate the export and import businesses. Thanks to their status as Islamic charities, the *bonyads* are exempt from taxation. This makes the government reliant almost solely on the revenues from the oil industry, which due to the sanctions imposed by the United States has never been able to attain the output it once did under the Shah. This is a theme almost reminiscent from the years prior to the French Revolution, when the nobility and clergy comprising the

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<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Maloney: *A report on "Bonyads: Power in Iran."* Middle East Institute Policy Briefs. <http://www.mideasti.org/html/maloneyb.html> (7 December 2002)

<sup>11</sup> These figures are in actual dollars and not in "purchasing power parity" (PPP) that is used by most contemporary indices.

<sup>12</sup> Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri, 132.

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank Group. *Islamic Republic of Iran Country Brief*. <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/mna/mena.nsf/Countries/Iran/716EBCBF845AD3F785256B740073AB54?OpenDocument> (8 December 2002)

First and Third Estates controlled the lion share of the French economy but paid no taxes. The result of this illiberal economic methodology has been a decrease in earnings for the Iranian population.<sup>14</sup>

The fourth institution is one that is disliked and feared in contemporary Iran, it is the *basiji*. They can be best described as a group of religious inspired thugs who act on behalf of the clerics who along with the *bonyads* are their key sponsors. They originated during the Iran-Iraq War (1979-88) as underage volunteers who would march ahead of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) during their assaults on Iraqi strongholds acting as human minesweepers. Members of today's *basiji* are those who are normally ineligible for military service such as the underage or middle-aged males. The *basiji* is not centrally controlled from Teheran, but rather, command is outsourced to the local mosques, which are in turn accountable to the *valy-e faqih*.

Khomeini originally relied upon the IRGC as stalwarts of the regime. The IRGC was used as the mainline military force during the war against Iraq because the regular Iranian military had been purged of its senior leadership and in turn was not trusted to be on the front because its loyalty was suspect. After the war, the IRGC retained its preeminence until 1994 when it began falling out of favor with the Islamic government.<sup>15</sup>

In August 1994, there was a large riot in a town called Ghazvin. The IRGC was sent to quell the riot, but in turn acted in a similar manner as the Shah's security apparatus twelve years earlier when they refused to take up arms against their fellow citizens. The riot continued with greater intensity for four more days until the *basiji* were called up and the riot was ended in very brutal fashion. The *basiji* were deployed again for riot control in Teheran in 1999

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<sup>14</sup> Zahedi, 98-9.

<sup>15</sup> Zahedi, 118.

after the IRGC was once again reluctant to face the crowds. From then on, the *basiji* have become the “storm troopers” of the regime.<sup>16</sup>

The *basiji* receive generous allowances from the government and a major point of contention with young people is that 40 percent of the vacancies at universities are reserved for them and to a lesser extent, war veterans, and the families of martyrs. This is a large portion of vacancies allotted for people who generally possess suspect academic qualifications to gain entry into institutions of higher learning. They are a vital constituency for the present regime, which goes out of its way to keep it loyal. During the recent student led riots against the death sentence imposed on Professor Hashemi Aghajari, Ayatollah Khamanei urged the students to desist because if they did not, he would be forced to call upon “some very dedicated Muslims.” There was no question as to whom these Muslims were; they feared the *basiji*.<sup>17</sup> The *basiji* were also used to great effect in suppressing the June 2003 student uprising.<sup>18</sup>

## **B. PERSONALITIES**

Perhaps, the biggest target of popular discontent is Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, the current *valy-e faqih*. The ascendance of Khamanei to supreme leadership was also an accident of history. This accident is relevant in that it exposes a very important weakness in the Iranian system of government, because the institution of *valy-e faqih*, having been designed by Ayatollah Khomeini, is personality dependent.<sup>19</sup>

Khomeini was charismatic and possessed the appropriate religious credentials around which the supreme leadership was created. However, when he died, he understood that there was no one who could fill his shoes. He faced a dilemma in that the *valy-e faqih* needed to be politically astute and at the same time be of high clerical standing. All of the grand ayatollahs that were in line to

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<sup>16</sup> Zahedi, 118.

<sup>17</sup> Zahedi, 119.

<sup>18</sup> BBC News. *Hope on the streets of Teheran*

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2996604.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2996604.stm) (26 June 2003)

<sup>19</sup> Ardeshtir Mehrdad. *Leadership; Crisis yesterday, deadlock tomorrow*. [Http: //www.iran-bulletin.org/leadership\\_crisis\\_RK41.htm](http://www.iran-bulletin.org/leadership_crisis_RK41.htm). (10 December 2002).

succeed Khomeini fit the latter category. As a result, Khomeini had to find Khamanei, who was a cleric but not an ayatollah to succeed him because he was politically savvy. Khomeini in a last act before his death modified the Iranian constitution to provide for this.<sup>20</sup>

Khamanei has realized from the beginning that his credentials were questionable and the theocracy's legitimacy undermined as a result. Therefore, he has resorted to very high handed measures against those who question him. This has caused a rift within the religious establishment who seeing Khamanei's inadequate stature are reluctant to side with an individual who is bearing a considerable share of popular resentment.<sup>21</sup> The following extract is a glimpse of the conventional wisdom surrounding the current supreme leader:

...Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamanei is bereft of all his predecessor's qualifications. Khamanei's scholarly accomplishments are too minute to qualify him as an ayatollah let alone a grand ayatollah. Khamanei was promoted to the rank of ayatollah, in blatant disregard of the long instituted *Shi'a* tradition of pedagogic standards.<sup>22</sup>

The increasing unrest has brought about a segment of clerics and government officials who desire reform. As a result, Khamanei has had to put himself above the Iranian constitution in order to retain his power. Although Khomeini also ruled above the law, in Iran, the conventional wisdom permitted him the luxury because he was decisive in ending the monarchy and had the charisma and religious credentials. Loss of that appeal on the part Khamanei has led to an appeal for "the rule of law" and this is where President Mohammed Khatami comes into play.<sup>23</sup>

Mohammed Khatami is currently the most well known member of the Iranian political establishment. He is known for his desire for reform within the clerical government and is a big advocate for the "rule of law."

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<sup>20</sup> Zahedi, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Zahedi, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Zahedi, 80.

<sup>23</sup> Rahe Kargar. *Sinking in the Jaws of a General Crisis*, Political report of the 5th Congress of the Organization of Revolutionary Workers of Iran. [http://www.iran-bulletin.org/report\\_5th\\_congress.html](http://www.iran-bulletin.org/report_5th_congress.html) (10 December 2002)

The Iranian presidency is once again unique. Iran could be considered one of the only countries with a branch of government that is superior to the executive, i.e., the Islamic clergy. President Khatami is in charge of the day-to-day running of the country and he has a 22-member cabinet, which he appoints and is confirmed by the *majlis* (parliament). The people vote directly for the president, vice-president, and the 290 members of the *majlis*. Iranians in general are pleased that they have control of at least this one portion of government. President Khatami, however, is not the commander in chief of the Iranian armed forces, nor does he control the judiciary. These positions are reserved for the *valy-e faqih*.<sup>24</sup>

Khatami is also a cleric, albeit one who recognizes the impracticality of the *valy-e faqih* institution. He was vetted as one of four candidates for the 1997 presidential election. Khatami previously served as culture minister during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani. He was well known for his progressive bent and religious credentials, and advocated reforms in the system. This act earned him the displeasure of the *mullahs* who pressured him into resignation. The Council of Guardians then vetted Khatami because they had too much faith in the strength of their popularity. The Council of Guardians felt it appropriate to give the reformists a token candidacy, which in the *mullahs'* minds was destined to loose. Unfortunately, for the *mullahs*, the favored candidate, Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nouri, lost the election to Khatami in a landslide. Khatami won about 70 percent of the vote in which nearly 80 percent of all eligible voters participated. The election was viewed as a protest vote against the status quo.<sup>25</sup>

President Khatami seeks to gradually reform the Iranian government in order to give the people popular sovereignty. His actions are almost a reminder of Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to reform communism by giving it a more "human face." In doing so, Khatami seeks to use the Iranian legal system despite all of its clerical checks and no balance. He has proceeded with caution in order to save himself the wrath of the *mullahs*. Even Khatami's caution was too much for the

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<sup>24</sup> PBS *Frontline: Terror and Teheran*

<sup>25</sup> Zahedi, 81-82.

*mullahs* to digest because he began to ask them to open the system and institutionalize the “rule of law” in order to prevent arbitrary rule as such is the practice today. He believed that more openness would expand opportunities for personal improvement and greater political activity. He published *Khatami’s 12-Point Platform on Individual Rights* and *The Economy needs Urgent Care* in 1997.<sup>26</sup> These publications along with his January 1998 interview on CNN with Christiane Amanpour in which he showered the United States with praise earned him the attention of former president Bill Clinton.<sup>27</sup>

Not to be outdone, the *mullahs* capitalized on Khatami’s Western exposure. They interpreted the large turnout in the 1997 election combined with his promotion of the “rule of law” as popular validation of the Iranian system of government. This began to gradually cast doubts on Khatami, because he has never made clear what he meant by the “rule of law.” Did he mean the laws of the status quo or laws by which governance was accountable to the people?<sup>28</sup>

Khatami was reelected in 2001 by another landslide. The Iranian president is allowed two terms. An attempt by former president Rafsanjani to amend the law to allow for a third term proved unsuccessful in 1996. During his second term, Khatami has made some effort to address the previous question. In September 2002, Khatami went to the *majlis* to ask for a new bill to be submitted to the Council of Guardians and the *valy-e faqih* asking for greater powers within the constitution. In addition he has also proposed the termination of the candidate vetting process and clerical control over the judiciary. This bill was overwhelmingly approved by the *majlis* but is currently facing an impasse within the Council of Guardians. Khatami has indicated that he would resign if the bill does not pass. Such an action could stir Iran into even greater turmoil.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Zahedi, 182.

<sup>27</sup> CNN Interactive. Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammed Khatami. <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html> (11 December 2002)

<sup>28</sup> A conclusion drawn by Dr. Ahmad Ghoreishi.

<sup>29</sup> BBC News. *Iran’s Parliament Backs Reformist Bill* and *Iran’s Khatami wants more powers*. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2436427.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2436427.stm) and [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2278345.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2278345.stm) (11 December 2002)



All of the abovementioned reformist credentials do not spare Khatami the ire of the general populace. This is because twice, the people have gone to the polls en masse to elect him and in five years he has had very little to show. What irks the Iranian reformist movement is that the *mullahs* were able to take advantage of the election turnout to validate their system. This same line of thought was also shared by Western observers and as a result, an ever increasing number of Iranians feel that Khatami's liberal stance has given the clerical regime undeserved international legitimacy. Khatami's cautious approach is derived from his acceptance of the *valy-e faqih* system, a criterion for candidacy. Therefore, he has failed to rally his large following as a bargaining chip against his adversaries. A look at recent events seems to indicate that Khatami's only bargaining chip is his resignation. Even though the president's resignation could provoke increasing unrest within the country, Iran still has a constitution that provides for presidential succession, and it is possible that the Council of Guardians could intervene to make sure that the future president follows the party line. In any case, this leads to uncertainty since a presidential resignation is unprecedented in Islamic Iran. Therefore, it appears that the popular consensus regarding Khatami is that he act decisively and start a chain of events that leads to change, or he get out of the way.<sup>30</sup>

### **C. POLICIES**

The most significant policy provoking disillusionment in Iran is the lack of social freedom. During the Shah's reign, Iranians had a great amount of social freedom but hardly any political freedom. The arrival of the clerics brought about some political freedom, albeit not by choice or intent; and a significant reduction in social freedom. Since the one of the appeals of any revolutionary movement according to Stephen Walt is that the disappearance of the old order will bring significant benefits, it appears to the Iranian people that in this case the revolution has gone in retrograde.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ahmad Ghoreishi. *Where is Iran headed?* Center for Contemporary Conflict Strategic Insights. <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/rsepResources/si/sept02/middleEast.asp> (11 December 2002)

<sup>31</sup> Walt, 336

About 65 percent of Iranians are under the age of 25. These young people have grown up in a country where it is difficult to participate in recreation or entertainment, especially with members of the opposite sex. Having heard tales about the significantly greater amount of personal freedom during the Shah's rule, a great many Iranians seek the same privileges their parents had but denied them thanks to their support for the revolution. Globalization has helped decrease the rift between Islamic Iran and the rest of the world. Thanks to satellite television and the Internet (Iran is the most connected country in the Middle East), have cut inroads into the domain of the *mullahs*. Globalized mass media is one arena, which is difficult for repressive regimes to control. Many stations that beam programming to Iran are in the United States (Los Angeles).<sup>32</sup> The *mullahs* go to great lengths to block these broadcasts and restrict Internet viewing, especially chatrooms. Because of the ever-changing nature of the Internet, there is little they can do. This is a sign of a weak political system because a strong system of governance has little to fear of diverging viewpoints.<sup>33</sup>

Iranian women have borne the brunt of the Islamic regime's reduction of social freedoms since they can no longer divorce, travel freely, or marry non-Muslim men. They also lost professionally because they cannot serve in the judiciary. However, a woman is currently Khatami's vice-president.

The major drawback is that economic prospects are dim with 5.5 million high school graduates and a million university graduates coming to the job market each year and hardly having a chance to make a living due to an unemployment rate of about 15 percent. The people need a social outlet, and that is denied them.<sup>34</sup>

U.S. Iranian relations are a policy area, which with respect to this work is not fully controlled by the Iranian government. It is also different because the Iranian people do not share the same views as their government in this matter.

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<sup>32</sup> Zahedi, 106-8

<sup>33</sup> Iran shuts Internet cafés. Asia Pacific Network Information Centre.  
<http://www.apnic.net/mailling-lists/apple/archive/2001/05/msg00012.html> (26 June 2003)

<sup>34</sup> Ahmad Ghoreishi. *Where is Iran headed?*

However, the lack of interaction with the United States, which was once its largest trading partner, has hurt Iran greatly. One of the key sectors where this can be felt is in the petroleum sector. Before the 1979 revolution, Iran produced 6 million barrels a day, however, since 1979, it has never exceeded 3.7 million. This is because most of the technical support for that sector came from the United States and lack of spare parts and necessary technology has hampered Iran. This is especially worrisome since the country relies very heavily on oil revenue. The current state of internal strife can only make matters worse for the *mullahs* as they have not the deep pockets with which to bribe the young masses into submission, as is the case with the Arab oil monarchies.<sup>35</sup>

The Iranian Revolution was the beginning of what has been almost a quarter-century of animosity between the United States and Iran. The Iranian Hostage Crisis (1979-81) was the axe that cut the once strong connections between the two countries. Confrontations between American and Iranian forces did not help matters especially when the latter was tacitly supporting Saddam Hussein in his war against revolutionary Iran.

The election of Mohammed Khatami brought about indications of a rapprochement between the two archenemies. In his interview with CNN in 1998 as well as on other occasions, Khatami has appeared willing to risk the wrath of the *mullahs* in order to start dialogue with the United States. The U.S. government viewed Khatami's appeal as sincere however; the latter also understands that the Iranian president is not the one who really calls the shots in Iran. The major U.S. grievances are Iran's support of terrorist organizations and weapons of mass destruction. And since it has previously been mentioned that Khatami is not even the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, it is unlikely he can propose any measures in this arena to the satisfaction of the United States<sup>36</sup>

Further dialogue between the two nations has been pretty much ruled out of the question because of the current War on Terrorism. The United States has

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<sup>35</sup> Iran Country Analysis Brief. U.S. Energy Information Agency.  
<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html> (14 December 2002)

<sup>36</sup> Michael J. Ring. *Changing the U.S. Policy Tune - The United States Should Respond Positively to Khatami's Overtures*. <http://www-tech.mit.edu/V117/N66/ring.66c.html> (14 December 2002)

Iran prominently placed on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. This led to President George W. Bush's inclusion of Iran in his "Axis of Evil." By doing so, the U.S. president decidedly threw his support behind the Iranian people in their struggle for democracy. A key reason being that some Iranians already think that it is bad enough that Khatami's gestures have brought the theocracy some much needed legitimacy in the international scene; however, if the United States, the world's most powerful nation opened dialogue with Khatami, among others, it would undercut the position of the dissident movement. Therefore, as far as the dissatisfied are concerned, the United States is actually serving as a counterweight against the *mullahs*.<sup>37</sup>

The dissidents' position is not without merit. The United States has been encouraging countries to become democratic. The Middle East has bucked the trend with its numerous autocratic regimes. Only Turkey and Israel are democratic. Iran on the other hand, has some semblance of popular participation in government. Therefore, the fall of the clerical regime could lead to the adoption of full democracy in Iran more so than in any of its Arab neighbors.

For over two millennia, Iran has sought to differentiate itself from the rest of the Middle East. Its lifestyle and culture has resisted Arab influence, foreign invasions, and political change. Unlike Turkey, Iran did not take its democratic cues from the west but found them through internal means. During the beginning of the twentieth century, the Iranian people sought protection against the arbitrary decisions of their government. This is why the *majlis* was created in 1908. It was an attempt by the people led by the bazaaris, clergy, and intellectuals to check capricious policies of Nassirudin Shah. The Shah who ruled during the late nineteenth century began selling concessions and large tracts of land that were not his to cast away to the British. Bowing to internal pressure, the concessions ended and the *majlis* was created to check the Shah. From this point on, any Iranian ruler who governed arbitrarily has been checked. The last

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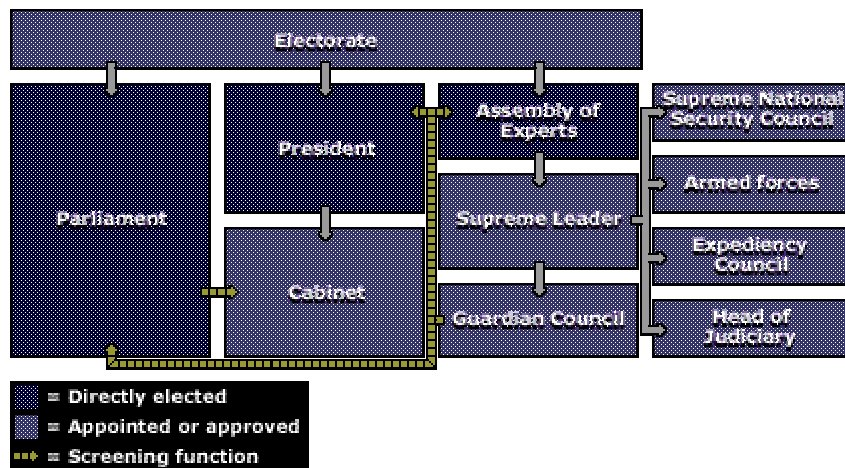
<sup>37</sup> Conclusion drawn by Professor Ahmad Ghoreishi in Politics and Government in Iran and Turkey class.

Shah and his father Reza were no exception, and it can be concluded that the *mullahs* themselves will fall into this category.<sup>38</sup>

Today, the arbitrariness of the present government stems from the *valy-e faqih*, Council of Guardians, Ali Khamanei, and Mohammed Khatami. The results are the present economic difficulties and lack of personal and social freedom, albeit with a semblance of political freedom to enhance legitimacy. Nevertheless, a minority holds the real political power in the country, which is not very responsive to the wishes of its citizens. The Iranians over the years have become more educated on average than their Gulf States contemporaries due to an arbitrary measure taken by the last two Shahs which sought to emulate Kemal Ataturk's attempts to forcefully push his people into the modern age through compulsory education. Arbitrary or not, the progress made in education could not be reversed by the *mullahs*. Higher education brings about greater political and economic awareness. This heightened sense of awareness has therefore increased the need for political change and the end of the *mullahs*' arbitrary self-serving policies, which are justified by selective interpretation and sometimes distortion of Iran's Islamic identity. This action by way of the individuals, institutions, and policies has helped stifle Iran's attempts at progress. It is also a sign that what Iranians really want is popular sovereignty.

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<sup>38</sup> Goldschmidt, 176-77



**FIGURE 1.**  
**The Iranian Government today.**

Source BBC News: Iran, the struggle for change.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in\\_depth/middle\\_east/2000/iran\\_elections/iran\\_struggle\\_for\\_change/who\\_holds\\_power/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/middle_east/2000/iran_elections/iran_struggle_for_change/who_holds_power/)

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### **III. HOW DOES THE THEORY OF *RELATIVE DEPRIVATION* APPLY TO IRAN?**

Ardeshir Zahedi in his book *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now* comments on “The Disintegration of the Iranian Revolution” in the introductory section of his work. He dissects the shortcomings of the 1979 revolution into three categories: socioeconomic crisis, political oppression, and pervasive corruption. It was after all, an attempt by the Iranian people to remedy shortfalls in these aspects of national life that prompted the internal unrest, which led to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi’s flight to exile and the beginning of the Islamic Republic that was expected to provide social justice and progress for all citizens. The various personalities, institutions, and policies of the Islamic government have not been able to satisfactorily address the economy, plurality, and transparency in a manner sufficient to forestall public dissatisfaction. As a result, such a dilemma, in the case of Iran can be explained by applying the theory of *Relative Deprivation* to the current situation in the country.

#### **A. RELATIVE DEPRIVATION**

*Relative Deprivation* is a means to arrive at a theory for explaining political violence and it is relevant in Iran because all of the major changes of government in that Middle Eastern country were accomplished by violent action. In the case of a future change of government there is a strong likelihood that there will be further violence; this despite the fact that the world has come to prefer non-violent handovers of power inspired mostly by the way the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell in 1989, regime change in South Africa, and the prevailing winds of democracy that have touched every continent in the post Cold War world. *Relative Deprivation* (RD) is defined below:

[As] a perceived discrepancy between men’s value expectations and their capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled.



Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining given the social means available to them.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to RD, Iranian governments from the times of the Qajars to the Pahlevis and ultimately the *mullahs* have either willingly or reluctantly given Iran what Gurr would call societal conditions that increase the average level or intensity of expectations without increasing capabilities thus increasing the amount of discontent. The expectations and capabilities in Iran will be defined shortly.<sup>40</sup>

Theocratic Iran is a good case study in the realm of RD. In the previous paragraph, there is the mention of increased value capabilities. This is derived from the ability for people to live in conditions which permit individual prosperity because foremost in the minds of most people is their ability to provide for themselves and their family. The condition is one of consistent economic prosperity. This leads to a clash between religion and economic prosperity because the former is by nature conservative and irrational because it is based on faith while the latter is progressive in order to avoid stagnation. Therefore, a regime based on religion has to stifle economic progress because this brings about the true value capabilities, which are political participation and the rule of law.

*Relative Deprivation* is important because of the likelihood of political violence. The more pronounced the discontent, the greater the probability of violence because psychological theory about group conflict suggests that there would be a general call to take action. These is when one would return to the events in Eastern Europe in 1989 and ask why then was there not great violence during the fall of the Communist regimes? Although this is a valid question, this issue should by no means be used to attempt to make sense of events in Iran. This is because in a Communist system, the scope of RD is reduced because the former Soviet Bloc countries were insulated from what was happening in the

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<sup>39</sup> Theodore Robert Gurr. *Why Men Rebel?* p. 13. Princeton University Press, 1970.

<sup>40</sup> Gurr, 13.

West and therefore the population's expectations were not high. This is illustrated by the construction of the Berlin Wall and the great effort expended by the Soviet bloc in keeping western media signals blocked. Since the expectations were low, and a high value was placed on egalitarianism in a Communist system, the value capabilities were also kept at a fairly low level. Since the differences between value capabilities and expectations were minimal there was little incentive for violence. The Communist system instead went bankrupt and had to open up to a more pluralistic form of government.<sup>41</sup>

## **B. CLERICAL LEADERSHIP LACKS CHARISMATIC DEPTH**

*Valy-e faqih* was the consolidation of Khomeini's thoughts on Islamic governance within a single individual who had simultaneously, charismatic, political, and legal legitimacy. The *valy-e faqih* is accountable to God and is above all politics and as a result, the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong.<sup>42</sup> This brought about a traditional form of leadership much different from a modern method by which a leader is chosen based on credentials and their appeal to the people. Khomeini had a significant following within Iran because of his charisma and ability to rally opposition to the Shah. Although it would be ideal to have a charismatic leader in charge of any country, it is highly unlikely that the successor, in this case Ali Khamanei would be able to live up to the image of the late Khomeini. Khomeini had the political capital to undertake unpopular but necessary decisions, the most well known being the termination of the eight-year war with Iraq in 1988. He is reported to have said that "I would rather drink poison out of a chalice than accept defeat to Saddam Hussein, but I will have to swallow the poison instead." Such a statement demonstrated the lack of charismatic depth in Iran's leadership because the leading clerics had to implore

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<sup>41</sup> This was a conclusion drawn by the Minister for German Reunification during a speech in 1994 at the World Bank in Washington.

<sup>42</sup> Abbas Abdi: "The Reform Movement: Background and Vulnerability" *Global Dialogue*, Summer 2001.

Khomeini who was practically on his death bed to make the decision, for they knew that the same decision made by any other Iranian would be cause for severe domestic instability.<sup>43</sup>

What does the abovementioned event signify? The men who inherited Khomeini's government, the current *valy-e faqih*, Ali Khamanei, President Mohammed Khatami, head of the Council of Expediency: Ali Rafsanjani, and head of the judiciary: Ibrahim Yazdi, to name but a few and lacking the political capital of Khomeini were invariably transformed into what Charles Ellwood mentions in his work *The Psychology of Human Society* as an immobile and inflexible regime.<sup>44</sup> As a result of the *valy-e faqih* and company's sense of insecurity, they must act mostly to preserve their own power therefore becoming what another author George Petee calls a barrier to change. This means that one important prerequisite for a new revolution in Iran has been met:

No revolution can actually occur unless the state has become a barrier to change, and the state cannot become a barrier to change unless its own form is in some way out of adjustment with the society it is supposed to serve.<sup>45</sup>

The maladjustment stems from the fact that the *mullahs* have up to now failed to adjust to the changes they helped engineer when the Shah left in 1979. An inevitable set of expectations comes with any change in government and in Iran there is a high index of value capabilities and expectations, key ingredients for a dynamic society. The problem is that there is a big difference between the two. So the question now would be what these value capabilities and expectations are?

### **C. RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AT WORK**

Value capabilities are what the people perceive themselves as capable of attaining and maintaining. The limiting factor is the combination of all values, which the nation is capable of distributing to its people. This in turn is limited by:

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<sup>43</sup> Dr Kalim Siddiqui: *Imam Khomeini in history, by History, for History*.  
<http://www.muslimmedia.com/archives/features98/khomeini.htm> (8 March 2003)

<sup>44</sup> Gurr, 148-9

<sup>45</sup> George Petee: *The Process of Revolution*. P-7-8. New York, Harper, 1938.

...extensive resources and a demonstrated capability to convert them into more satisfying conditions of life, and if people have a reasonable opportunity for sharing its benefits, the value capabilities are bound to be high.<sup>46</sup>

Iran is a country with extensive resources. It is the second largest exporter of crude oil in the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC), the cartel that controls most of the world's fossil fuel production. In addition to which Iran home to almost a tenth of the world's proven crude oil reserves and fifteen percent of natural gas reserves. The wealth derived from such resources if used wisely can be transformed into assets that can be used for the benefit of most of the country. The use of the word "most" is because in any society it is impractical to satisfy everybody.<sup>47</sup>

#### **D. ECONOMIC VALUES**

One of the objectives of the 1979 revolution as Zahedi states below was:

[The promise] to create an economically developed and independent Iran in which the fruits of economic growth and prosperity were to be combined with equity and social justice. Civil liberties as well as the right of citizens to petition their government through the formation of voluntary associations and political parties were to be assured.<sup>48</sup>

The *mullahs* have failed to live up to any measure of this post-revolutionary promise. The continued decline of the Iranian economy as well as policies enacted by the *mullahs* especially the late Ayatollah Khomeini is to blame. The first of such policies was the aggravated animosity towards the United States. The Shah was a treasured ally of the United States and as a result, large-scale investment especially from the West flowed into Iran. This investment made it possible to develop Iran's petroleum sector in order to permit the efficient export of crude oil, which was and still is the principal foreign exchange earner. After the Shah fell from power, the revolutionaries set their sights on the United States. This was during the interlude between the Shah's

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<sup>46</sup> Gurr, 123

<sup>47</sup> Iran country Analysis; U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Information Agency.  
<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html> (5 March 2003)

<sup>48</sup> Zahedi, 3

departure for Egypt and the consolidation of power by the *mullahs*. The result was the seizing of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and the hostage crisis, which lasted over a year. Although the *mullahs* consolidated their power after the hostages were taken, it was Khomeini's insistence on keeping the crisis going in order to gain ever increasing popularity and inflict a black eye on the most powerful nation on earth and justify his divine credentials that blocked all hopes of restoring a meaningful relationship with the United States.<sup>49</sup> After all the embassy was stormed in November 1979, but the United States only broke diplomatic relations with Iran in April 1979. The falling out with the United States stopped the influx of foreign investment since most American companies left Iran and other western companies saw the country as too unstable to continue to do business in.

When American and other western companies were conducting a large volume of business in Iran, a large section of the population felt cheated because the rewards were heavily distributed among those who were well connected with the Pahlevis. The intellectuals who were opposed to the Shah also saw Iran as a country pursuing a course of dependent economic growth. This was the economic condition the *mullahs* who ultimately gained power during the revolution promised to address.<sup>50</sup>

After the revolution, Iran nationalized most of the large-scale industries that were built with foreign assistance and capital. Other foreign investments were appropriated by the regime. The same fate befell the Shah's vast land holdings. A large portion of these assets were distributed the *bonyads*. With the sudden influx of funds, the *bonyads* were able to gradually acquire a very dominant role in Iran's non-petroleum sector. One of the biggest examples is the case of the *bazaaris*.

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<sup>49</sup> The Iranian Revolution really caught the Western world by surprise; Khomeini convinced his followers that the fact that the most powerful nation on earth could not react to the events was an Act of the Almighty. The failed hostage rescue in April 1980 was further validation of the divinity of the Revolution when a dust storm caused an aircraft collision that killed eight members of the force in the *Dasht-e Kevir*. (Dr. Ahmad Ghoreishi in U.S. Policy in Iran class)

<sup>50</sup> Zahedi, 3

The *bazaaris* are the equivalent of what small-scale business people in any western economy. The *bazaaris* have been well established in Iranian society for centuries and have been for the greater part of time living in a rather comfortable wedge between ordinary people and the clerical elite. The *bazaaris* range from ordinary street vendors to large-scale merchants. They normally have the blessing of the *mullahs* because in Muslim tradition, a fraction of their income is paid to charity in the form of *zakat*, one of the pillars of Islam.<sup>51</sup>

Before the revolution, the Shah, in a bid to develop the country during his lifetime, counted on huge amounts of foreign investment. The *bazaaris* stood to lose from this aspect of modernization because Iran in the 1960's and 70's did not have solid financial institutions to absorb the windfall petroleum profits. Thanks to the oil boom, inflation spiraled and the *bazaaris* could not keep pace with it. Adding to the *bazaaris* woes, the introduction of large foreign supermarket chains began to cut into their profits. Therefore the *bazaaris* were eager to throw in their lot with the revolutionaries in order to get rid of the Shah. The arrival of the *mullahs* was seen as a blessing given their previous coexistence.<sup>52</sup>

The *mullahs*, in a bid to institutionalize their control over Iranian society made the *bonyads* powerful because the sizable assets that were appropriated from international business concerns had to be retained within politically reliable circles. Zahedi gives an example of the *bazaaris* plight:

The *bazaaris* have not been exempted from state taxes and customs duties, nor have they been given a free hand in determining prices. Indeed, the theocracy has proved itself to be just as harsh, even more severe than the monarchy in controlling and repressing segments of the *bazari* community. The theocracy has even resorted to executing dissident *bazaaris*, a course of action not entertained by the Shah.<sup>53</sup>

Theodore Gurr asserts that economic values can be sorted into six important categories. These are the availability of natural resources; the

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<sup>51</sup> Zahedi, 85.

<sup>52</sup> Professor Ahmad Ghoreishi.

<sup>53</sup> Zahedi, 88.

technology and skills to make use of such resources; labor to apply those skills to the resources at hand; capital to provide labor with the tools to work; societal structures capable of organizing these factors of production and distributing the output; and systems of beliefs that make cooperation possible in order to produce and distribute goods and services. A significant reduction in the ability to provide conditions for any of these six categories to flourish will bring about economic stagnation.<sup>54</sup>

Oil reserves have brought about a certain amount of wealth to the country it accounts for about 90 percent of the government's foreign exchange earnings therefore the first category is satisfied.<sup>55</sup>

Technology and skills to make use of the oil wealth is in Iran's case is of cardinal importance. Although the oil reserves in Saudi Arabia and Iraq are by far the largest in the world, Iran is not far behind, and geographically, it controls the longest coastline along the Persian Gulf through which half of the world's oil is transported. It would be foolhardy to write-off Iran after all the 1953 coup that overthrew Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq took place because he nationalized Iranian oil. The absence of American know-how has hurt Iran's petroleum sector. To put this in perspective, in 1977 the last year of the Shah's regime with relative political stability, an average of between 5 and 6 million barrels of crude oil were exported from Iran. By 2002, Iran managed only 4 million. (FIGURE 2) In contrast, Saudi Arabia in 1977 exported about 9 million barrels of crude and with 8 million in 2002. Saudi Arabia's production never dipped below 8 million for the corresponding time period. These figures demonstrate that the lack of American entrepreneurial skill and technological advice have kept Iran from developing additional oil extraction capability from the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Basin resulting in the country's inability to produce to full capacity at a time when its own internal consumption has risen significantly

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<sup>54</sup> Gurr, 130

<sup>55</sup> Iran Country Analysis, Economic Overview. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html> (9 March 2003).

thanks to a Khomeini inspired population boom in the 1980's.<sup>56</sup> (FIGURE 2) Currently, Iran does not even meet its OPEC production quotas. As a result, other oil producing nations are robbing Iran of much needed income.<sup>57</sup>

Iran has the labor to put the petroleum resources to work for it. With a population of 65.1 million in 2001, Iran is the most populous country in the Middle East. Since the reign of Reza Shah, there has been a significant push for education in Iran. Of all the Gulf States, Iran has one of the lowest illiteracy rates in all of the Middle East and North Africa with only 15 percent in contrast to the latter's average of 34 percent. This means that there are 34 million literate people, a population larger than that of all the Gulf States combined except Iraq.<sup>58</sup> This description of literacy in Iran is not meant to imply that there is an abundance of people with the exact skills necessary to make Iran self sufficient in the qualified manpower necessary for proper conversion of natural resources. It however addresses the fact that Iran, with higher literacy levels has a better intellectual baseline than its Middle Eastern counterparts which in turn equates to higher potential. This potential helps accentuate RD if it is not being used properly because in the case of Iran, the fourth category, the capital to provide labor with the tools to work is diminished. The educated populace expects to be able to adequate work but due to the lack of capital there is reduced ability to provide work outside the civil service or petroleum skills. The Iranian civil service was about 800,000 strong during the Shah's last year in power. By 1993, it reached an astonishing 3 million strong. This almost four-fold increase in public sector workers has not corresponded with a similar increase in revenues.<sup>59</sup> Capital as mentioned previously in this work comes mostly from foreign investment and secondarily from private Iranian ventures. Thanks to the Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996 the United States can sanction any company

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<sup>56</sup> Bijan Mosavar-Rahmani: *Oil in U.S.-Iranian Relations*.

<http://www.worlddialogue.org/pdf/speech8.pdf> (9 March 2003)

<sup>57</sup> *Iran, Iranian History, Land and People. Fossil Fuel*. <http://www.sanibrite.ca/iran/oil.asp> (9 March 2003)

<sup>58</sup> Iran, World Bank Country Overview.

[http://www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/aag/irn\\_aag.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/aag/irn_aag.pdf) (9 March 2003)

<sup>59</sup> Zahedi, 4.



that conducts over \$40 million in business with Iran or Libya. ILSA, extended by President George W. Bush in August 2001 for five more years, has hampered Iran's ability to borrow money from foreign creditors.<sup>60</sup> ILSA has rendered Iran ineligible to participate in debt servicing with the *Paris Club of Bankers*, an informal organization that helps coordinate solutions to help developing countries service debt. As a result, Iran had to negotiate bilateral agreements with 19 different countries!<sup>61</sup> The capital generated by the *bazaaris* would not be sufficient to provide an adequate tax base from which the government could generate revenues on the scale necessary to make up for both the shortfall in oil and foreign investment. Further aggravating the labor issue is the significant increase of Iran's population after the revolution. (FIGURE 3) Shortly after Khomeini became supreme leader, Iran was invaded by Iraq. Since Iran embarked on a very anti-western ideological stance, most of the developed world threw their lot behind Iraq. The United States was no exception to this trend and in the hopes of frustrating the new theocracy it tacitly supported Iraq. Khomeini had few friends but thanks to the military ineptness of Saddam Hussein, Iran managed to occupy important tracts of Iraqi territory through persistent human wave attacks. This prompted the *valy-e faqih* to ask Iranians to have more children causing the population to double over the last generation. These war inspired children have come of age and also need to be absorbed into the workforce.<sup>62</sup>

The societal structure capable of distributing the output of the Iranian economy is corrupted because of the government's mismanagement of the economy, which has hampered the absorption of new university graduates into the economy. The *bazaari* community can be divided into the enfranchised and the disenfranchised. The former are the *bazaaris* who are well connected with

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<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs.  
<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01080303.htm> (9 March 2003)

<sup>61</sup> Paris Club. Presentation.  
<http://www.clubdeparis.org/en/presentation/presentation.php?BATCH=B01WP01> (9 March 2003)  
and Zahedi, 5-6.

<sup>62</sup> Zahedi, 4.

the regime. There has been significant mention of the malaise of the Iranian government's revenues in this work. Part of the malaise spreads towards the area of foreign exchange reserves which as of early 2003 amount to \$15 billion against an external debt of \$23 billion.<sup>63</sup> The low foreign exchange reserves translate into reduced ability to import goods and services and in turn raise the price of hard currency in Iran. The enfranchised *bazaaris* have access to hard currency at the official rate while the not so well connected have to settle for the unofficial exchange rate, which is more realistic. By conducting such policies, the government is subsidizing the importers connected to the regime with its meager hard currency assets.<sup>64</sup> The connected *bazaaris* are able to reap an unfair advantage when redistributing their goods and services within the country because they can trade at market prices. They do not pay taxes; therefore, the government gains little by sponsoring them. Viewed from the *mullah's* prism, such unsound economic policies are the price of conducting business; albeit a very expensive one. The anti-inflationary measures of the Rafsanjani presidency magnified the woes of the ordinary *bazaaris*. Incidentally, Rafsanjani was able to enrich his family through the export-import business.<sup>65</sup> The *mullahs'* attitudes towards the inflationary problems are best summarized by this extract:

...the Islamic Republic has been unwilling to shoulder responsibility for inflation. Seeking to mollify public opinion, the regime has blamed inflation on hoarding and price gouging on the part of *bazaaris*, among other factors. In addition, it has engaged in the imposition of price controls which are considered anathema from the perspective of the *bazaaris*.<sup>66</sup>

The *mullahs* face a danger within the realm of RD by undertaking such appeasing policies. According to Gurr, if the economic expectations of some groups, in this case the customers increase (price stabilization measures produce a measure of hope) there is a higher propensity towards political violence because the economy is stagnant. The reason for this is that the

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<sup>63</sup> Iran World News and Events; Economy. <http://www.iranworld.com/news&events/nec-m999.asp>. (9 March 2003).

<sup>64</sup> Zahedi, 89.

<sup>65</sup> Ghoreishi

<sup>66</sup> Zahedi, 89

government can induce the perception of rising economic capability by suddenly curbing inflation and allowing the people's money to stretch farther by taking symbolic actions against the *bazaaris* or other perceived economic enemies. If there is no similar increase in the people's economic value, then there is the potential for discontent because the government's measures would ring hollow after a period of time.<sup>67</sup> This brings about the final category, the system of beliefs that makes cooperation possible in order to distribute goods is compromised because of the inconsistency with which the *mullahs* dictate economic policy. All of the economic measures described so far demonstrate that the Iranian government applies fiscal policy in manners, which are convenient in order to retain its hold on power. By acting in this form, the government induces the perception that it is occasionally acting on the people's behalf, and on other times, acting against them. By constantly raising and reducing expectations, the *mullahs* walk a fine line between stability and unrest. This does not mean that in all cases, there will be violence that will be of magnitude to topple the regime. There is an important caveat.

Financial well-being is the easiest measure of popular satisfaction because it is essential for physical existence. Most people therefore notice small changes in income. Iran's economy has not yet fallen to the subsistence level. Life is hard for people but there is no government-induced starvation like in neighboring Iraq where food was used as patronage for regime loyalists due to United Nations sanctions. When the economy falls to subsistence levels, the people begin to be more preoccupied with their daily survival. At this point, they are incapable of rebellion. This was the situation inside Iraq, but not in Iran.<sup>68</sup>

#### **E. PARTICIPATORY EXPECTATION**

The principal reason the Iranian people wanted to get rid of the Shah was because of the lack of political freedom due to his neopatrimonial regime. There was an abundance of social freedom as women were freed from the veil and

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<sup>67</sup> Gurr, 130

<sup>68</sup> Gurr, 131

allowed to attend schools. Aside from the social arena, the Iranian people had very little say in their government. The more educated people become, the more aware they are about their political and economic situation and they seek freedom to influence it. For the most part, only the well connected benefited and the Iranian intellectuals of the day were bought off by the Shah, exiled, or violently repressed at home.

A distinguished Iranian sociologist of pre-revolutionary times, Ali Shairiati believed that Iranian identity was bound with *Shi'a* Islam. In his very anti-imperialist poetry, Shariati saw the road to Iranian resurrection in the adherence to "true Islam." Shariati died in 1977 at the age of 44 in London. Although the British coroners declared his death as a result of a heart attack, he was believed to have been murdered by the Shah's secret police, SAVAK. Whether this is true or pure speculation remains to be proved, however, in his martyrdom, Shariati's beliefs served as added justification for the creation of a religious state as evidenced in this extract:

True Islam is on the side of the disinherited who are enjoined to act in order to bring about the realization of a just society. Shariati equated justice with equality and argued that it could only be realized in a religiously inclined, classless social order. ...Shariati maintained that the forces of injustice in the modern world were embodied in arbitrary despotic rule, imperialism, and Zionism.<sup>69</sup>

Combining Shairiati's claim with a work by Peter Pulzer on ideological appropriateness, it can be inferred that when the Shah was tottering on the brink and a disorganized opposition was seeking the end of his rule; the rallying of the revolutionaries, accomplished through the organizational expression of *Shi'a* Islam the exploitation of the Iranian people's spirituality towards the establishment of the Islamic Republic.<sup>70</sup>

Shariati's reasoning fit the philosophies of Khomeini like a glove. Khomeini believed that the religiously inclined society should be led by a *valy-e faqih* who was above all politics and served as a supreme judge and interpreter

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<sup>69</sup> S. A. Arjomand. "Iran's Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective." *World Politics*. p 93. April 1988

<sup>70</sup> Gurr, 203

of the *Qu'ran* in his capacity as *marja'-e taqlid* (top religious reference). With this justification in hand, Khomeini in 1979 was declared *valy-e faqih*. In this position, he was commander in chief of the armed forces, had the power to declare war or peace, to call for referenda, and name the president. Although the Iranian President who acts as the head of state is popularly elected, the *valy-e faqih* has to sign a decree before he can assume the position.<sup>71</sup>

The vetting of candidates by the clerics leads to the ultimate disenfranchisement of the people despite regular elections. The people do not have any say in the power that matters, that of the *valy-e faqih*. This results in a *dictatory-e sulaha* (dictatorship of the pious). A fact further reinforced by the current *valy-e faqih's* lack of *marja'-e taqlid* credentials leading Khomeini to amend the rules for succession of the supreme leadership.<sup>72</sup> Abbas Abdi describes this situation as a presidency which serves as a mere executive assistant and a *majlis* (parliament) that is only a consultative body.<sup>73</sup>

The problem is that the proportion of political elite positions (*mullahs*) to political participants is very low and unlike Gurr's implication that the incumbents are reluctant to be replaced (which is fundamentally true), very few people have the means and connections to become a *mullah*, especially one of high standing such as an *ayatollah-Islam*. The conventional remedy for such a situation would be:

If the participatory value position of ordinary citizens is low, their value capabilities can readily be expanded in almost any type of political system by the development of political party organizations, interest associations, expansion of franchise and increased frequency of elections.<sup>74</sup>

Gurr argues that participatory expansion of this sort is normally opposed by elites. This is valid in Iran. The participatory dimension brings to light the problems surrounding a traditional form of leadership. Khomeini had religious

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<sup>71</sup> Zahedi, 158

<sup>72</sup> Ebrahim Yazdi. Speech on evolution of Iranian society (Middle East Institute, Washington D.C., 1998). <http://www.payk.net/maillingLists/iran-news/html/1999/msg00427.html> (10 March 2003)

<sup>73</sup> Abdi, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Gurr, 144-5.

credentials to fill his tailor made *valy-e faqih* position and simultaneously serve as a *marja'-e taqlid*. At the same time he ruled Iran as a shrewd politician. Traditional forms of leadership rely mostly on messianic figures and it would be unreasonable to expect a successor to have the same disposition. Khamanei has been measured against his predecessor with only one favorable comparison, his skillful mastery of politics. When Khomeini changed the *valy-e faqih* requirements shortly before he died in the summer of 1989 he opened the theocracy's legitimacy to question because if the *Allah* has designated infallible Imams as his representatives on earth to rule the people and for the latter to discover his wisdom and submit to the *valy-e faqih's* leadership, then why is the present supreme leader not as religiously wise as he is supposed to be? This is perhaps a question that can only be answered by Khomeini; however, he is dead and buried. Given this discrepancy, it is apparent that the theocracy is hollow and that maybe sovereignty should be derived from man rather than the Almighty.<sup>75</sup> With Khomeini's death, the regime lost its charismatic and political legitimacy. Instead of trying to bolster the regime's legal legitimacy, a more reasonable approach given the transparency and objectivity of laws, Khamanei tried to hone charismatic qualities. He fell short.<sup>76</sup>

Gurr establishes the connection between regime legitimacy and political violence stemming from dissatisfaction. He states that if the people feel that their government is proper, only very strong countervailing motives would encourage people to act against it. If a highly legitimate regime as was Iran during the days of Khomeini, embarks on an unpopular policy such as accepting defeat in the war with Iraq, there is bound to be some protest because such an action although necessary is inconsistent with the regime's image. That is why the leading *mullahs* asked Khomeini to accept the United Nations moves to end hostilities. On the other hand, if the regime fails to respond to pressures to reform, participatory RD increases to the point where violence is directed towards the policies and incumbents who imposed the latter. A good example is the Hashemi

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<sup>75</sup> Yazdi speech

<sup>76</sup> Abdi, 28

Aghajari controversy. Dr. Aghajari was sentenced to death by the Iranian judiciary in late 2002. Because of the great upheaval surrounding this decision, his death sentence has floated from appeal to appeal because of the *mullahs'* reluctance to face the consequences of Aghajari's execution. This is what can be explained in RD theory as the last resort, which transforms a legitimate form of government (because the *mullahs* claim of popular validation through elections) into an illegitimate institution. People who regard their regimes as legitimate have little incentive for political violence because there is a satisfactory means to redress dissatisfaction. When this is not the case, the climate is ripe for political violence as has been the case especially after Aghajari's death sentence.<sup>77</sup>

The term *mullah* has been used a great deal so far. Although Iran is a theocracy, the *mullahs* are not a monolithic bloc; especially since the death of Khomeini. The next chapter examining the *coercive balance* will discuss that in greater detail. Khomeini commanded enough respect since he was a *marja'-e taqlid* to keep the clerics united and quell disputes internal to the clerical leadership. Khamenei's is unable to wield the same power; however, he does keep the *mullahs* united to a considerable extent, mostly through the patronage described in the economics section. The most notable rift within the *mullocracy* comes from Ali Montazeri. In February 1989, he wrote the following to Khomeini:

In these ten years, we have shouted slogans which were wrong and which have isolated us in the world and have alienated the people from the regime-there was no necessity for such slogans...I hope there will be a change now that we are entering the second decade...I hope the next decade will not be full of slogans but deeds...We need a major change in the country's management.<sup>78</sup>

Montazeri, who was supposed to be Khomeini's successor as *valy-e faqih* was promptly disinherited and sent to Qom where he has been in house arrest since 1989. Montazeri is a good case of elite RD. What he envisioned as expectations for the regime, two-way respectability from people and government,

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<sup>77</sup> Gurr, 187

<sup>78</sup> Zahedi, 179. From Iran Quarterly Report, 1997.

as well as social justice and prosperity were not realized in the decade after 1979. As a result, Iran's dire straits have brought discredit upon the *mullahs*. Such discredit has therefore made the clerics oppressors. Since the advent of Islam in Iran, and the nature of Shiism with its hierarchy, the clerical institution has always been a buffer between the state and the people. Now that the clerics are in power, they have lost stature because of their insistence in retaining power. An insistence which can be understood because many of them endured long prison terms and other brutalities imposed by the Shah before they had their day of glory and ascended to Iran's leadership.<sup>79</sup> Thus it can be inferred that *mullahs* such as Montazeri who has been described by Moshen Khadivar, leader of an Iranian association fighting for press freedom as "the spiritual father of Iranians who believe in the rule of law and democracy" has seen the indications of RD in Iran and wants to avert the total discredit of the Shi'a clergy. Montazeri is kept in house arrest because the leadership believes that if he is released, he would become the focal point for reform.

*Relative Deprivation* always exists in some shape or form in any society. It is the magnitude of such deprivation, which increases the probability of political violence geared towards the end of the existing regime. It is not easy to live within the confines of "divine legitimacy" when it is apparent that there are inherent flaws in the people who believe themselves to be the messengers of God on earth. This is further accentuated by the apparatus of the state deciding upon the definition of the Almighty. Hence a serious condition where the *valy-e faqih* operating as the ultimate authority, is accountable to no one.<sup>80</sup> Shi'a Islam and strong levels of faith are associated with Iranian society. However, part of the expectation in faith is that some expectations will be realized and in effect, the flock is satisfied with not being able to see or identify the Almighty save for during prayer or thought. This has been corrupted in Iran because the *mullahs* have made faith appear to be real and tangible and as a result of unmet expectations, the people are starting not to like the elements of faith that they

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<sup>79</sup> Ghoreishi

<sup>80</sup> Abdi, 31-32.



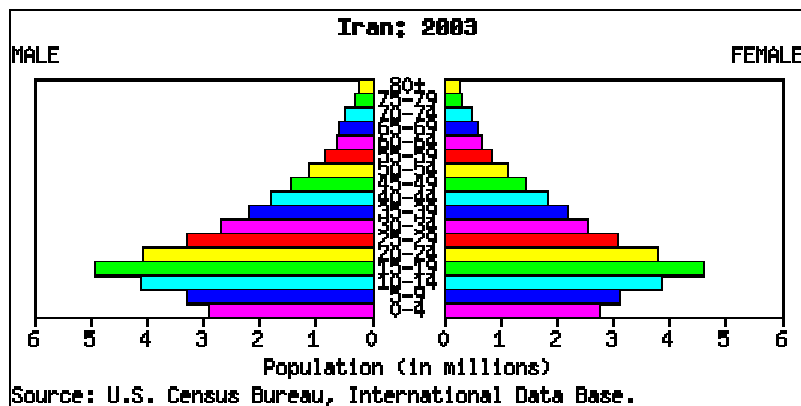
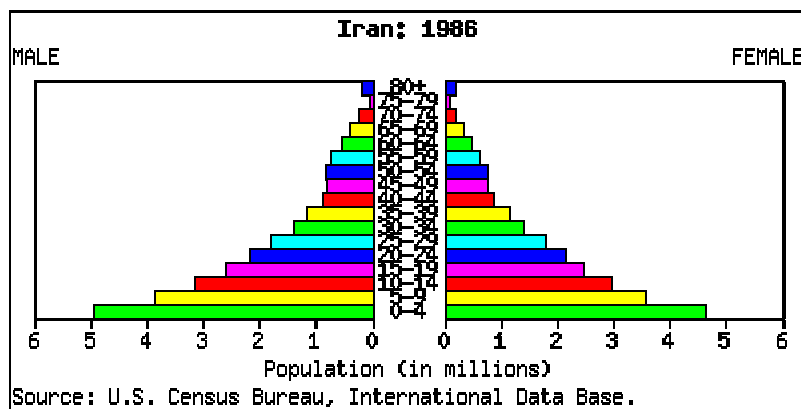
witness on a daily basis. This might be the theory behind Ayatollah Montazeri's reasoning and his attempts to save the faith by severing its ties to the state. The apparatus of state, legitimate, or illegitimate, is source of great amounts of power and deference. Only the mature are able to step away from such power after their mandates. In Iran, the mandate comes from God and not the people; therefore, individuals feel that they no control over their own destinies. These discrepancies have to be settled, but since it is hard for the *mullahs* to step down, the longer the settling of accounts is put off, the greater the violence needed to settle them, hence the theory of *Relative Deprivation* is alive and well in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

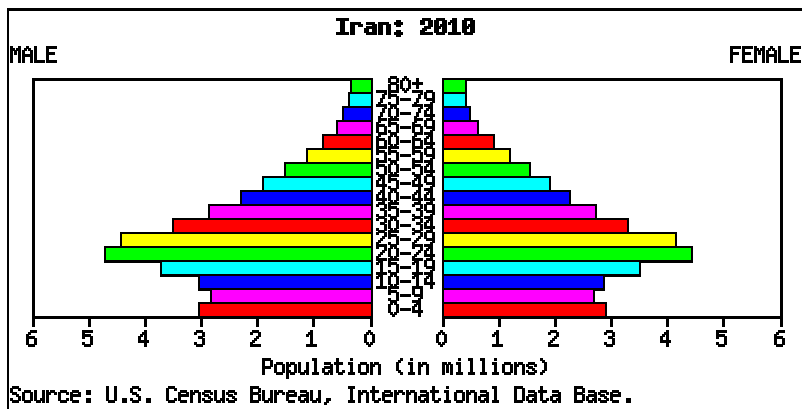
**FIGURE 2.**

**Iranian population pyramid:**

Note the increase of births after the revolution and six years into the Iran-Iraq War.

By 2003, the people born during the Iran-Iraq War are now teenagers. The civil service is already lagging behind in the employment of the 25 to 50 year olds. It now has to contend with the bulge in the 15-19 year old range that also needs work.



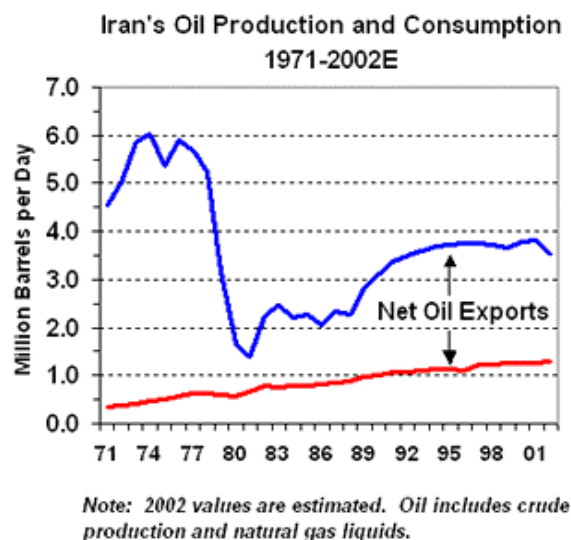


The population problem is further aggravated when the post-revolutionary generation reaches its most productive age (20-50). Iran will need an increase in revenues greater than the increase in population as well as a corresponding increase in productivity in order to keep them employed. Given Iran's situation, this is unlikely.

### **FIGURE 3.** **Oil Production:**

Since sanctions were imposed on Iran by the United States, the country has not come close to producing to its capacity. The rise in internal consumption can be accounted for by the increase in population. Source: U.S. Department of Energy: Energy Information Administration.

<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html>



#### IV. WHAT IS THE IRANIAN COERCIVE BALANCE?

The June 2003 riots in Teheran, Shiraz, and Tabriz were significant because this was the first time that massive rioting took place simultaneously in places other than Teheran. These riots coupled with the *mullahs'* reluctance to follow through on Aghajari's punishment, prompt observers to ask whether the Iranian government possesses enough long term coercive power to back up its policies. Another dimension to this issue is whether the Iranian opposition has enough coercive capability to make the *mullahs* succumb to government reform? This leads to what Theodore Gurr, a scholar of social revolutions calls the *Coercive Balance* theory.

##### A. COERCIVE BALANCE THEORY: FORCE AND COUNTER FORCE

Theodore Gurr discusses how social discontent can be politicized leading to political violence. In the study of the violent aspect of regime changes, the coercive balance between the incumbents and dissidents is analyzed. As the people are threatened by the regime, they try to defend themselves. The *mullahs* cannot afford to show weakness and have to crack down on dissent. This leads to what is aptly named force and counterforce.<sup>81</sup> If the *mullahs* respond to force with increasing counterforce, there will be an escalation of political violence. Counterforce will be linked to the present regime because in Iran today, they do not have the initiative and thus have to react to the people's actions. According to Gurr, there are two limitations on the escalating spiral of force and counterforce: one group will have to run out of coercive resources first or attain the capacity of genocidal victory over its opponents.<sup>82</sup>

Ardeshir Zahedi states that regardless of social scientists theoretical inclinations regarding social revolution, one thing remains constant: a military breakdown of the old regime is necessary for any social revolution to succeed.

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<sup>81</sup> Theodore Robert Gurr: *Why Men Rebel?* p 232. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970

<sup>82</sup> Gurr, 231

Against a well-led and disciplined military, armed and unarmed masses have little hope of victory.<sup>83</sup> Put into an Iranian context, observers during the 1979 revolution believed that the Shah would not fall because if his formidable U.S. supplied military forces were unleashed, civil unrest would end. This is where the military leadership issue comes to a head. Since the Shah prevaricated in the face of adversity, there was a breakdown of military leadership and the well-equipped military forces and chains of command broke down.<sup>84</sup>

## **B. INCUMBENTS**

Both sides of the coercive balance have ideologies, institutions, and leadership. Solid evidence of all three is necessary for the success of either side. The incumbents will be analyzed first. The theocratic leadership is also divided into its own factions. However, these factions control the organs of coercion under the legitimacy of the *valy-e faqih*. Mehdi Moslem, in his book *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* claims that there is rivalry between the populist and revolutionary dimensions of the regime:

As a result, based on their religio-revolutionary credentials and the fact that they are under the authority of the *faqih* the different factions are unaccountable to the central government, the *nehads* (revolutionary bodies) have frequently challenged the dominance and policies of the republican institutions as they have independent sources of legitimacy, sovereignty, and authority outside the central government.<sup>85</sup>

There are three important factions within the *mullocracy*. The first faction is the “Line of the Imam” (LOI), which was the Late Ayatollah Khomeini’s favorite faction. Members of the LOI were Khomeini’s most faithful supporters and were considered by him to be the “true supporters of the Prophet Muhammad.” During the *majlis* elections of 1987, Khomeini made sure that members of the LOI got seats in the body by urging them to break away from the rival Combatant Clergy

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<sup>83</sup> Dariush Zahedi: *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now, indicators of regime instability*. p34. Boulder, Westview Press, 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Zahedi, 165.

<sup>85</sup> Mehdi Moslem: *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. p 38. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2002.

Association (CCA). The LOI believe in the export of the revolution, suppression of political, ethnic and religious dissidents, and centralized economics.<sup>86</sup>

When Khomeini died in 1989, in a bid to save himself from being upstaged by his predecessor, the new *valy-e faqih*, Ali Khamanei, began to purge the LOI from the *majlis*. President Rafsanjani, a staunch member of the LOI, switched sides to the CCA. In 1992, the LOI followers had only 40 seats in the 270 seat *majlis*. This is when the security forces: Committee for the Iranian Revolution also known as the *Komiteh* (KII) and the Gendarmerie were merged. All LOI members were purged from the security forces. The CCA holds most of the seats in the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, Society of Theological Scholars (Qom) and the Secretariat of Friday Prayer Leaders. In addition, the CCA controls all of the powerful *bonyads* resulting in about 80 percent of Iran's economic activity. They believe in the *valy-e faqih* and pragmatic foreign policy. The CCA opposes the *bazaari* institution save for the ones they control through the *bonyads*.<sup>87</sup> This is the most important faction for the obvious reason that it led by the *valy-e faqih*. It plays host to the most important coercive forces of the regime that are supported by its relative commercial might in Iran. As a result, the CCA merits a more detailed look.

The Iranian constitution provides for a separation of powers but not central accountability so one government branch may occasionally be made stronger than the others in order to satisfy the demands of current politics. One of these branches in the Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) charged with safeguarding the revolution and from internal threats and ensuring the purity of the revolution. The IRGC is therefore independent of the army.<sup>88</sup>

Upon the election of Khatami in 1997, the IRGC commander of the time, Rahim Safavi, declared: "We do not interfere in politics but if we see that the foundations of our system of government and our revolution are threatened...we

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<sup>86</sup> National Council of Resistance of Iran Foreign Affairs Committee: *The Myth of Moderation; Iran under Khatami*. . p 44-46. National Council of Resistance of Iran Press, Auvers-sur-Oisne, 1998 Chapter Three: Sanabargh Zahedi The Three Factions of the Clerical Regime.

<sup>87</sup> National Council of Resistance of Iran Foreign Affairs Committee, 47-49.

<sup>88</sup> Moslem, 38

get involved.” This shows complete lack of respect for government institutions on the part of another body that derives legitimacy from the *valy-e faqih*. Safavi’s declaration shows what kind of resistance, dissidents are up against.<sup>89</sup>

On similar lines, the powerful *bonyads* (Islamic Charity foundations) enable the *faqih* the flexibility to apply pressure to dissidents and relieve international pressure. Salman Rushdie, author of the infamous book *Satanic Verses* had a *fatwa* (religious decree) calling for his execution. This among with other Iranian hits against various dissidents earned the theocracy increased international animosity. In 1996, the Iranian Foreign Ministry announced that the government would no longer pursue the *fatwa*. The leader of the *Fifteenth of Khordad bonyad*, Ayatollah Hassan Sane’i doubled the price on his head and proclaimed that *fatwas* issued by the former *valy-e faqih* were irreversible. With this, he enhanced his legitimacy because he upheld Khomeini’s policy and at the same time provided a means for the central government to pursue Rushdie if it so desired.<sup>90</sup>

*Hezbollahis* are considered the ultimate stalwarts of the theocracy. They do not apply to one particular faction within the theocracy but are rather accepted as individuals who are highly religious and guard the principles of the regime. The best known of the *hezbollahis* are the *basijis*. There are dissident factions who address themselves as *hezbollahis* but in Iran, this is a term used mostly to acknowledge the neo-fundamentalists (*Jame ‘eh-e ye Hizbollah*). In 1992, the *basijis* were legitimized in a two-step process. The first was the government’s increase of funding for local mosques in order to increase popular religious awareness and practices. The next event was the *majlis* enactment of the “Law of Legal Protection for the *Basiji*.” The 1992 law permitted the *basiji* to assist law enforcement agencies in fighting crimes around the country.<sup>91</sup>

The 1994 riots in Ghazvin raised the *basiji* to prominence and they eventually became the informal praetorian guard of the regime. The *basiji* is

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<sup>89</sup> Moslem, 38.

<sup>90</sup> Moslem, 38-39.

<sup>91</sup> Moslem, 216-217.

informal in the sense that they are outsourced to the mosques, which provide for the upkeep of the men. The local mosques keep close relationships with the *bonyads*. This is thanks to the fifth pillar of Islam, *Zakat*, which dictates that every Muslim must donate a fraction of his or her income to a charity. The *bonyads* hence sponsor the mosque and subsequently the *basiji*.<sup>92</sup>

Evidence of factionalism within the leadership circle is demonstrated when Moshen Rezai as leader of the IRGC in 1996 stated that the guards will oppose the entry of liberals into the *majlis* even if they were elected. This was a harder line taken to restore some measure of respect after the loss of face in Ghazvin. Apparently, this loss of face has not been completely restored since in November 2002, Ali Khamanei said that if student riots continued in protest of Aghajari's death sentence, he would be forced to call on the dedicated Muslims to restore order.<sup>93</sup>

These rifts cause a crisis of confidence in Iran today. The first aspect is the peoples questioning of the legitimacy of the theocracy because the fundamentals of Islamic and republican governance were never reconciled. Khomeini's death left the job unfinished.<sup>94</sup> To defeat challenges, the *mullahs* must be able to provide a united front. So far, they have been able to act decisively when their collective interests are threatened. The procrastination in finalizing Aghajari's legal status is beginning to show some strains in the *mullocracy*.<sup>95</sup>

Ali Rafsanjani parted ways with Khamanei because the latter begun to remove Rafsanjani's protégés from the security posts they were given during the massive security mergers of the early 1990's. Rafsanjani formed the Servants of

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<sup>92</sup> Zahedi, 118.

<sup>93</sup> Ahmad Ghoreishi. *Where is Iran headed?*\_ Center for Contemporary Conflict Strategic Insights. Accessed on 11 December

2002<<http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/rsepResources/si/sept02/middleEast.asp>>

<sup>94</sup> Q&A, Iran's Political Tensions. BBC News, 26 November 2002. Accessed on 16 March 2003. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2515933.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2515933.stm)

<sup>95</sup> Zahedi, 174.



Construction (SOC) in 1995, the third and latest faction. The SOC is a relatively new faction that chose Gholah Karbaschi, former mayor of Teheran as its Secretary General.<sup>96</sup>

Iran is different from most Middle East states in that the security forces are not established to keep one individual or ethnicity in power at the expense of all others but to maintain the clerical hold on the reins of power. To achieve such ends, efficiency is sacrificed. Iran's coercive apparatus is therefore divided into three major sectors. The first is the Interior Ministry's Law Enforcement Forces (*Niruha-yi Entezami-yi Jomhuri-yi Islami*). They engage in such activities as enforcing public morality standards and cracking down on the media.<sup>97</sup> The Ministry of Intelligence and Security, (*Vezerat-i Ettelaat va Amniyat-i Keshvar* (MOIS) normally cracks down on overseas dissidents. This organization absorbed the successor of the Pahlevi's SAVAK (*Sazeman Ettela'at va Keshvar*), SAVAMA (*Sazeman Ettela'at va Amniateh Mihan*) in 1984.<sup>98</sup> Overseas operations are supplemented by the Jerusalem Force (*Qods*), a branch of the IRGC. Ali Khamanei's Combatant Clergy Association is firmly in control of all of the significant coercive elements in Iran.

Finally, the Iranian armed forces are responsible for external defense. Although this work is only concerned with coercive elements that can frustrate the opposition, the military is important with respect to its history. Because the Iranian military was inherited from the Shah, there was and still is considerable distrust focused towards it. The army is therefore deployed far away from the capital Teheran guarding Iran's extensive land frontiers with special emphasis on archenemy Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>99</sup>

*Jane's Intelligence Review* describes some of the important security legislation in Iran and begins with the United Security Forces Bill of 1990. The

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<sup>96</sup> Sanabargh Zahedi, 50-52.

<sup>97</sup> A. William Samii: *Factionalism in Iran's Domestic Security Forces*. *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*. 16 March 2003. [http://www.meib.org/articles/0202\\_me2.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0202_me2.htm)

<sup>98</sup> *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Iran; 77

<sup>99</sup> IRAN - A Country Study. U.S. Library of Congress: Iranian Armed Forces. 16 March 2003. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/irtoc.html>

significance of this legislation is that after Khomeini's death, factional politics in the higher reaches of the theocracy was threatening the *valy-e faqih's* control of the security forces. Unable to control them as Khomeini had, he had President Rafsanjani organize a merger between the Armed Forces Logistical Agency and the IRGC. The Committee of the Iranian Revolution (*Komiteh e Inqelab e Islami*) was merged with the gendarmerie and police. This reduced the number of security forces Khamanei had to keep track of and helped him consolidate power.<sup>100</sup>

### C. DISSIDENTS

Although the *mullocracy* is fragmented, the opposition is in far worse shape. By and large, opposition to the clerical regime is vast. The majority of university students and private citizens feel alienated by the *mullahs*, hence the unrest. Iranian opposition ranges from monarchists to Marxists. The monarchists are divided between the *Arya Mehr*, *Derafsh Kavyani*, and *Pars*. The Washington based lobbyists are the American Iranian Council (AIC), Persian Watch Council (PWC), World Political Action Committee (WPAC), and the Iranians for International Cooperation (IIC). The Marxists which were embodied in the pre-revolutionary *Tudeh* lost their moral compass with the fall of the Soviet Union and are still looking for some sort of alignment.<sup>101</sup>

Such is the fragmentation of the opposition that the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) has found it rather easy to target dissidents in exile. One of the most well known cases being the murder of the Shah's last Prime Minister, Shapour Bakhtiar in Paris in the early 1980's and the *Mykonos* incident where four Kurdish dissidents were killed in Berlin. This last incident triggered an arrest warrant issued by Germany on the Minister of Intelligence and Security, Ali Fallahian-Khuze. MOIS attributed the killing to "rogue" elements in 1999. A notorious MOIS operative Saeed Emami "committed suicide" in prison. He was being held for the murder of Dariush and Parvaneh Foruhar in 1998. Although

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<sup>100</sup> Moslem, 192 and *Jane's Intelligence Review*; 78

<sup>101</sup> Sam Ghandichi: *What is Wrong with the Iranian Opposition?* (18 March 2003).  
<http://www.ghandichi.com/158-individuals.htm>

the last two incidents were setbacks for the regime, it showed that the long arm of the *mullahs* had a worldwide reach. Dissidents have been assassinated in every continent. Thanks to the *bonyads* the regime has deniability, although it is hollow because such subcontracting is enabled by the legitimacy the foundations have by following the dictums of the late Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>102</sup>

#### **D. CONSISTENT COMPLIANCE AND FLEETING COMPLIANCE**

Coercive control, the ability for either side to have *consistent compliance* with the leadership's directives is paramount. In the case of the revolution's guardians, the IRGC, there is an acute case of *fleeting compliance*: evidence of this was during the Ghazvin incident and the 1997 elections in which Mohammed Khatami won in a landslide but IRGC personnel voted for the reformist oriented president in higher proportions than the general populace. Khatami received about 70 percent of the IRGC vote. On the other hand, 24 senior IRGC officers wrote a letter to Khatami urging that he get a "grip" of the situation during the 1999 student riots in Teheran. Interestingly enough, there was little that Khatami could do to restore order since he did not control much in the way of coercive capability. The IRGC was still trying to save face from Ghazvin and the *basiji* had to join in the riot control efforts.<sup>103</sup>

The emergence of *fleeting compliance* within the coercive forces of the regime leads to a need for positive and negative sanctions. This shows the potential of regime vulnerability. According to Gurr, two things have to occur, praise or censure of the offending parties (IRGC) or redistribution of goods and services. The *basiji* have benefited from the latter. They are outsourced to the mosques, which benefit from donations from the *bazaaris* favorably connected to the *bonyads*. This brings about a system of patronage whereby the regime has to funnel money from an ailing economy to provide for the *basiji*. The latter have to be subsidized because as war veterans, a substantial number of them are

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<sup>102</sup> Kianouche Dorrantie: *Suspect in Iranian dissident murders commits suicide*. Accessed 18 March 2003. [http://www.metimes.com/issue99-26/reg/suspect\\_in\\_iranian.htm](http://www.metimes.com/issue99-26/reg/suspect_in_iranian.htm)

<sup>103</sup> Michael Eisenstadt: *The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment*. 18 March 2003. MERIA: Middle East Review of International Affairs <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2001/issue1/jv5n1a2.html>

unemployable, and even if they were, Iran's economy is unable to absorb all of them. Some *basiji* get special treatment for university admissions that further accentuate the problem because the educated *basiji* will expect more from a regime that is increasingly unable to provide. At some point, the regime is going to see its ability to sponsor the *basiji* diminished. At the same time, the country will be unable to achieve genocidal means of coercion; hence the *mullocracy* can find itself in danger.<sup>104 105\*</sup>

#### **E. MAGNITUDE OF VIOLENCE: INTERNAL WAR, TURMOIL, AND CONSPIRACY**

The coercive balance ends with the estimation of the magnitude of political violence. There are three types of violence: internal war, turmoil, and conspiracy.

The most severe type of political violence is internal war. Internal wars are rare and in essence, they are a full-fledged civil war. This occurs when the regime and dissidents coercive capabilities are approaching equality. In essence, this means that the Iranian opposition will have to muster forces as capable as the IRGC and *basiji*. In order for this to occur, the opposition must have solid leadership that is capable of keeping its members in line and apply sever sanction to discourage apathy or defections. Since the Iranian opposition lacks such a leader, internal war is a very remote probability.<sup>106</sup>

In the event the dissidents command substantially less coercive power than the regime, an internal war is out of the question because they cannot organize themselves. However, they might take a protracted approach in inciting limited violence in the hope they may exert some influence in the *mullahs* policies. If the defenders of the status quo are strong, the result is only sporadic violence. When the incumbents are unable to exercise coordinated coercion, they are bound to fall. This occurs due to regime weakness. Iran faces the possibility of chronic turmoil because the coercive balance is lopsided. If the regime vacillates, it may suggest to the dissidents that they have equal coercive

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<sup>104</sup> Gurr, 235

<sup>105</sup> An assessment by Dr. Ahmad Ghoreishi in U.S. –Iran Policy Class.

<sup>106</sup> Gurr, 235

capability with the regime and therefore, localized riots spread into an all out revolution. A glimpse of this was seen in June 2003. So far, the *mullahs* have been able to act decisively; however, if they run out of money to pay off the *basiji*, the latter will lack the incentive to fight.<sup>107</sup>

A conspiracy occurs if the coercive balance favors the incumbents and the dissidents attempt to form clandestine organizations that focus on a perceived weakness of the regime. Conspiracies need very capable and disciplined low profile leadership. A conspiracy also requires a large potential of coercive capability as a standby measure. This could be in the form of possible third party intervention such as the 1953 coup against Mossadegh. Conspiracies normally come in the guise of a military coup. However, the *mullahs* have practically neutralized such an event by having the military stationed as far away as practical from Teheran and outsourcing the *basiji*.<sup>108</sup>

Such a move by the *mullahs* produces an interesting twist. Dissidents in Iran are not necessarily based solely in Teheran. If they were, the dissident movement would have greater coercive capability. With sympathy of some of the regimes security apparatus, the opposition may have the upper hand. By having an outsourced *basiji*, the *mullahs* have negated Mao Zedong's "tears in water" effect whereby the opposition can blend into the city making a government crackdown difficult. With mosques as an integral part of the community, so long as the money flows to the *basiji*, the regime is secure because it has an immediate coercive and over-watch structure on the people.<sup>109</sup>

The clerical regime is by no means united but it wields undisputed control upon the national instruments of coercion. The opposition is as disunited now as it was in 1979. The important point of this chapter is to show that even though there is disunity within the Iranian dissident movement, the *mullahs* can still loose their hold on power. The manner in which the opposition operates is important because it is preferable that they come to some sort of consensus before the

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<sup>107</sup> Gurr, 235-236.

<sup>108</sup> Gurr, 281.

<sup>109</sup> Gurr, 262.



## **F. CLOSING ANALYSIS**

The theory of Coercive Balance leads to the suggestion that the Iranian theocracy may succumb to turmoil because in its present state, the *mullahs* control the preponderance of force although they remain fragmented, and the dissidents who are also fragmented feel emboldened by regime vacillation and the external pressures from the U.S. led overthrow of Saddam Hussein in neighboring Iraq. The occurrence of turmoil leads to the last level of analysis, the potential endgame: will the theocracy be overthrown or collapse.

## **G. REGIME COLLAPSE**

The current state of internal Iranian politics does not favor an overthrow of the theocratic regime. The magnitude of political violence is very unlikely to be a conspiracy to which an overthrow of the regime is directly associated because conspiracies require a good measure of coercive power which is focused at a key entity of the theocracy which appears to be very vulnerable. This same entity, if neutralized needs to be able to render proper governance of the state next to impossible. Therefore, given the fictionalization of the mullahs and the intricate web between the ruling clerics, religious establishments, and their dominant economic role, there is no single point of vulnerability. Also mentioned earlier in the Coercive Balance section are the three important factions within the theocracy: the Line of the Imam, Combatant Clergy Association, and the Servants of Construction, one may ask whether a conspiracy can target all three successfully? For all practical purposes, it will be close to impossible for a conspiracy to succeed without a single point of vulnerability because conspirators must have very capable leadership and maintain a low profile in the planning stages.<sup>110</sup> Targeting the three institutionalized religious factions is made difficult because a wider web of conspirators is necessary. A wider network of conspirators ultimately compromises the plotters security and whatever coercive resources they may have will be spread thin because they will have to concentrate on three focal points instead of one. The last concern is that close

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<sup>110</sup> Theodore Robert Gurr: *Why Men Rebel?* p 236-7. Princeton University Press, 1970.

coordination is necessary and timing would be of the essence. A conspiracy with three focal points cannot be successful if one of the targets are not neutralized simultaneously. As a result, such an action is very risky and does not show promise of a reasonable level of success. This does not mean that there are no conspiracies against the theocracy.

The more likely end the *mullahs* may meet is their collapse. The theocratic apparatus led by the *valy-e faqih*, Ali Khamanei, could lose effectiveness, suffer a reduction in coercive capability, and legitimacy. The previous chapters have indicated how all of the above are presently occurring inside Iran. Since the coercive balance in Iran is overwhelmingly on the side of the *mullahs* and lacking the charismatic leadership of the first *valy-e faqih*, Khomeini, suffers from an erosion of legitimacy, amid increasing discontent, the economic forces of the regime are the primary sources of loyalty for the incumbents. Increasing reliance on the *basiji* and the methods through which patronage is dispensed has made co-optation the bond between the ruling clerics and the enforcers. A serious downturn of the Iranian economy could make aggravate this bond causing an erosion of loyalty from the *basiji*, Revolutionary Guards, and even the military. Another factor seldom mentioned is the civil service which helps makes the state governable. If significant numbers of civil servants happen to go uncompensated for a prolonged period of time, acute paralysis may overcome Iran.

When looking at the possibility of clerical collapse in Iran, its western neighbor appears to hold some of the cards, which can dictate what may or may not happen. With the end of Saddam Hussein's regime and the United States, the *mullahs'* principal enemy in control of Iraq, Iran appears to be heading for a crossroads. The first dimension is from a political standpoint. After U.S. President George W. Bush labeled Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" along with Iraq and North Korea, the *mullahs* have seen one of the triad effectively defeated in sound fashion and totally occupied within three weeks. This is not suggesting that Iran would meet a similar fate for it has almost three times the population of Iraq and over double the land area. The pawns in this case become the *Shi'a*



majority in Iraq. The United States is trying to set the stage for a stable Middle East beginning with a democratic Iraq that could serve as an example for other countries in the region. From an American point of view, democracy is the best way to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq and ensure that its three major ethnicities, *Shi'a*, Sunnis, and Kurds, live together with some semblance of peace and have the benefit of the potential wealth that the oil that lies beneath their soil can bring. If the American attempt at democratizing Iran is even close to being successful; combined with the rising discontent with the *mullahs* in Iran, the winds of change may very well arrive in Teheran. This is because the *valy-e faqih* system as mentioned has its legitimacy based on the fact that the holder of the position will rule Iran in the name of the Twelfth Imam. It so happens that the two holiest *Shi'a* shrines are not in Iran, but in neighboring Iraq. If the people who control the two holiest *Shi'a* shrines are capable of coexisting within some democratic framework, Iranian dissidents will wonder why the Iranian clerics who control the lesser shrines like Qom cannot live up to the same principle. The *mullahs* will see their legitimacy undermined further. In their bid to forestall democracy in Iraq, the *mullahs* hosted Ayatollah Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) during his long exile. The *mullahs* have guarded optimism that Iraq would be transformed into another religious state.

Although the *mullahs* want Iraq to become a theocracy, the possibility of this happening in Iraq is not high because the United States has made it clear that it would oppose such a move. A good democratic framework cannot exist with a tyranny of the majority, and the *Shi'a* population in Iraq is only 65 percent against 90 percent in Iran. A theocracy in Iraq would only be of short-term usefulness to Teheran because there is a possibility that the struggle to assert legitimacy on the part of a possible Iraqi theocracy might be undermined by the *mullahs* in Iran. Iranian clerics would see an Iraqi theocracy as a means to exert greater control over the shrines in Najaf and Kerbala in an attempt to retain their legitimacy at home. The Iraqis would react to increasing foreign intervention, as

they would like to be masters of their own destiny. This will lead to a bitter polarization of the *Shi'a* sect and probable warfare between Iraqis and Iranians. This will induce heavy strain on Iran's already weak economy, although it could help rally enormous support behind the *mullahs*.

A more likely scenario is the return of economic viability in Iraq. Iran's neighbor has the world's second largest petroleum reserves. After over two decades of deprivation due to war and sanctions, Iraq, once its oil infrastructure is reconstituted, will tap the resources for its benefit. This will lead to a situation in which an oil producer with immense reserves returns to the global from which it has been inadequately represented for over a dozen years. Iraq's entry into the oil market in full force will lead to a drastic fall in oil prices because the United States helped guarantee the availability of its resources. This will mean diminished revenues for Iran as well as all of the other countries in the Gulf region. Therefore, the *mullahs* will face only rising discontent and diminished ability to co-opt the coercive powers at their disposal. Given the *mullahs* inability to provide, there will be little incentive to remain loyal to the latter.

The situation in Iraq will be done more justice if studied by another observer. It is only mentioned because in the introductory chapter, there was mention of three significant pressure points on the Iranian regime: economic dire straits, the Global War on Terrorism, and the lack of social freedom suffered by the general populace. The results of the U.S. led occupation in Iraq therefore serve as a catalyst that can only serve to increase the magnitude of the pressure points for the reasons mentioned above. The fact of the matter is that the *mullahs'* survival has gradually shifted from a largely theocratic basis since the death of Khomeini to one based on patronage to mainly the *bonyads* and *basiji*. Therefore no matter which way things go in Iraq, a severe impact will be felt on the *mullahs'* coffers because it has been exhaustively mentioned that 80 percent of the country's revenues come from petroleum. Since the clerics have effected little progress in the country since 1979, further aggravation of the Iranian economy will bring about a level of discontent they themselves cannot handle

because their principal means of coming to terms with challenges is by directing money to their stalwarts to suppress the problem. Since Iran is nowhere near subsistence level like Iraq used to be during the period of United Nations sanctions and Saddam Hussein, a point of diminishing returns will arrive for regime supporters. The June 2003 riots are starting to awaken the world to the dwindling lot of the *mullahs* because once again they had to rely on *basiji* motorcycle gangs to suppress the student protests. The students are far from isolated from the world because of the Internet and satellite television. These media show the students what they are missing out on while the theocracy continues. Clerics like Montazeri, witnessing the damage the theocracy is doing to the faith and as such try to distance themselves from the mainline establishment.

And although we would like to see a peaceful regime change in Iran, it is all the more unlikely because if sovereignty is transferred to the people peacefully, the *mullahs* will no doubt be credited for such foresight leaving them in a position to exert the same influence which they young Iranians, the majority of the population seek to avoid.

This work is not an attempt to predict when the change in Iran will occur for history has been most unkind to those who have tried to predict the course of Iranian history. It is merely a collection of some of Theodore Gurr's theories of social revolution combined with a follow up on the previous work of Dariush Zahedi in order to identify conditions, which will lead to the end of the Iranian theocracy. Given the facts and interpretations from this work, it is apparent that the internal and external pressure points will overcome the *mullahs*.

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